

Satyananda Yoga in Italy

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Italian Tours – 1994 and 2006

Continuation of Inspiration

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In humility
we offer this dedication to
Swamí Satyananda Saraswatí,
who is
inspiring and guiding
Swamí Níranjanananda Saraswatí
to live as a sannyasín.



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Published by



Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2010
Second edition 2013

ISBN: 978-81-86336-93-9

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan, Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net, www.rikhiapeeth.net

Printed by Kraftwerk at Aegean Offset Printers, Greater Noida.

Swami Niranjanananda in Italy
1994 - 2006



1994

In his first visit to Europe since being recalled to India and Ganga Darshan to assume the presidency of Bihar School of Yoga in 1983, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati chose Italy as his first stop.

During the ten-day visit, Swamiji visited several cities of Italy, gave public lectures, held satsangs at the Italian ashrams and centres, met disciples and aspirants, and also gave initiations. Many felt that they were seeing Swami Satyananda in the form of Swami Niranjan. His wisdom, yogic insight, clarity of thought and lightheartedness assured the old and created a whole new generation of yoga aspirants.

In Torino, Swamiji presided over a public lecture at the Colosseo Theater where 700 delegates attended his lecture. On the following day, a program of satsang and initiation was held at the centre in Torino. Swamiji then travelled by car to Rimini where he presided over a seminar attended by 300 delegates from all over Italy. Following this, he conducted a havan at the ashram in Montescudo and had a meeting with Italian yoga teachers. Swamiji was then accompanied to Florence where he gave satsang at the Satyananda Centre of Florence.

On the occasion of Swamiji's visit, Satyananda Ashram Italia published the book *Kundalini Tantra* in Italian.

At the conclusion of his visit, Swamiji said, "I have come to Europe after a gap of fourteen years and I am happy that I came to Italy first, because here I have found your affection, support and care, and it is something which I will always remember." Words to cherish indeed!



Swan 1994

Torino, 4th October

Place: Teatro Colosseo

Program: Public lecture on 'Yoga for the Integration of Body, Mind and Spirit'

Torino, 5th October

Place: Corso Raffaello

Program: Mantra diksha, lecture on 'The Science of Mantra', meditation

Rimini, 7th–9th October

Place: Rimini Punta Nord

Program:

- Public lecture on 'Yoga and Meditation'
- Lectures on: 'Meditation', 'Yoga: a Gift of Peace', 'Koshas: the Five Aspects of Human Personality'
- Satsangs on: Evolution, kundalini, spiritual guide, chakras, psychic symbol, bhakti yoga, yoga and creativity, guru and guru-disciple relationship, sadhana, mantra, sankalpa, kirtan, pratyahara, spirituality, gunas, life of Paramahamsaji

Montescudo, 10th October

Place: Montescudo Ashram

Program: Havan, satsang with yoga teachers

Firenze, 11th–13th October

Place: Satyananda Ashram

Program: Satsangs on: Paramahamsaji's life and mission, ego, yoga therapy, sannyasa, guru-disciple relationship, love, personal mantra, sankalpa, creativity, qualities of a disciple, kirtan.



The Necessity of Integration

Torino, October 1994

Hari Om Tat Sat

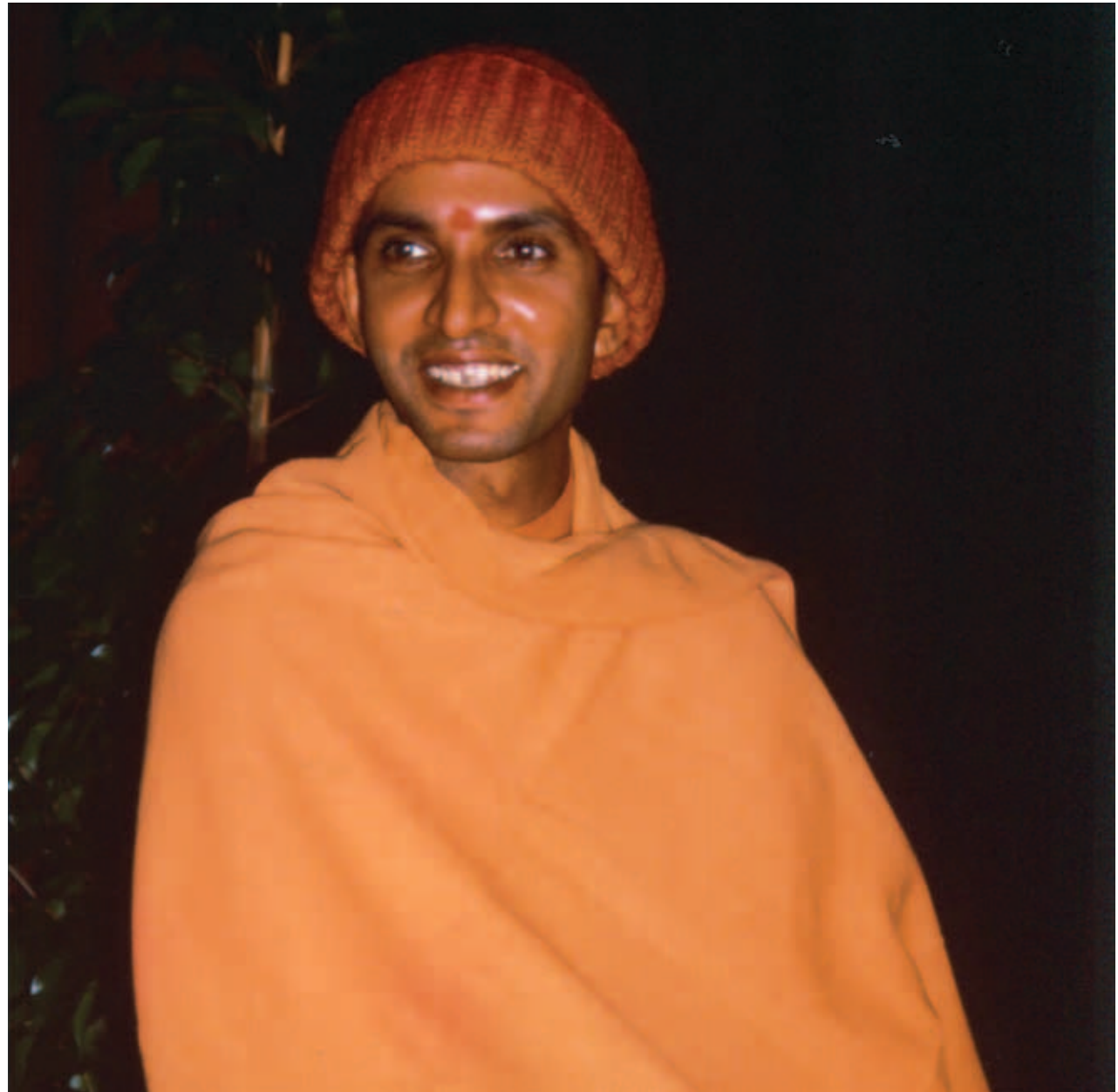
I bring you greetings from an ancient spiritual tradition to which I belong and also from the land of Bharat. In English it is translated as India, but *Bharat* means a land which is immersed in light. Therefore, when I say this name I do not mean the present Indian state, but the ancient spirituality which has evolved in that part of the world.

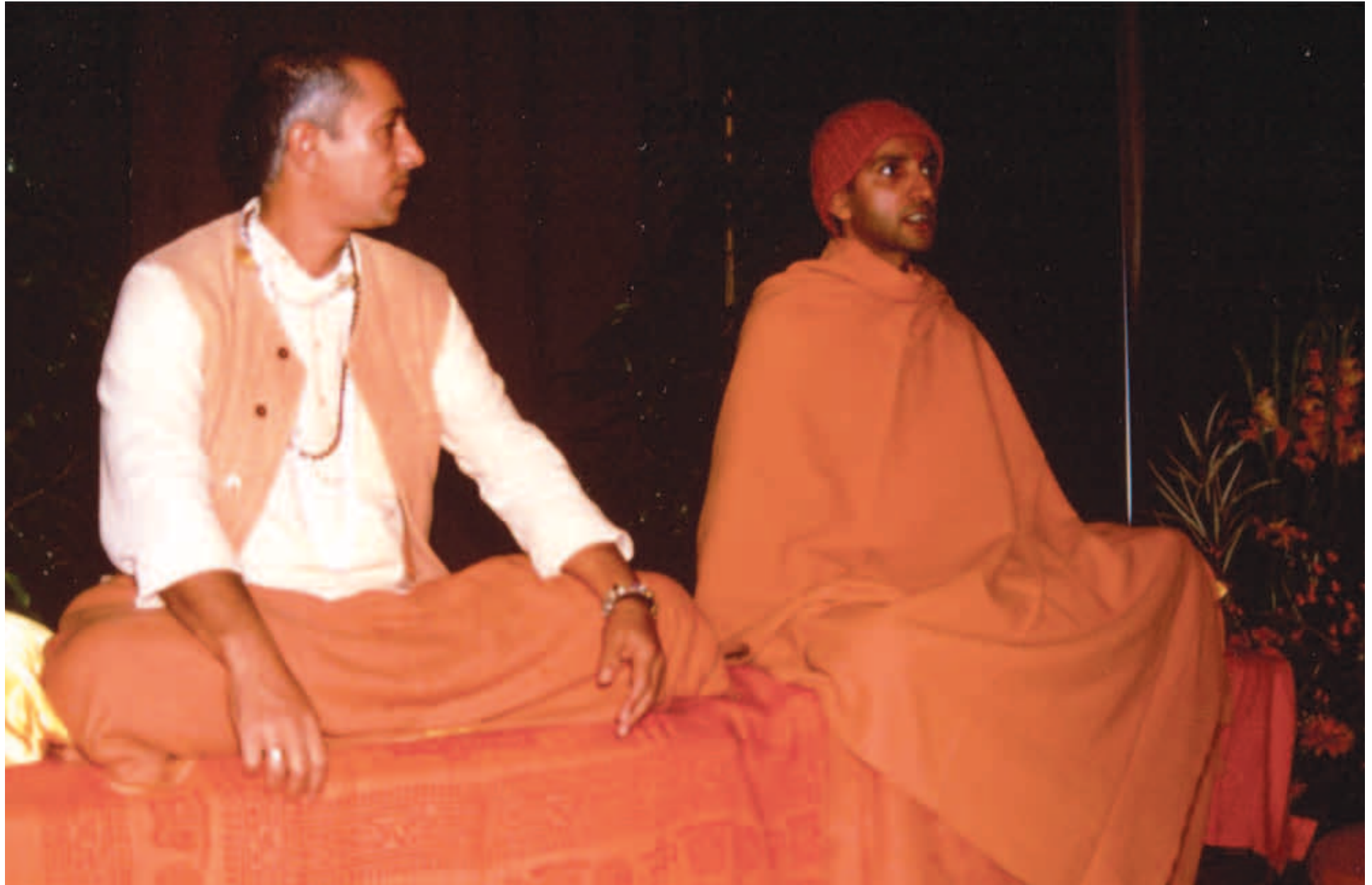
In the history of human civilization there have been two distinct mentalities. One mentality evolved externally and tried to modify nature to suit the external needs of human society. This civilization is known as the scientific or western civilization. The other mentality did not look outside, but evolved inside, trying to understand the nature of human personality, life and the relationship of the human being with the universe. This discovery of human nature is reflected in the eastern civilizations.

Today, in the present age, there seems to be a need for these two mentalities to come together. The external life is not the ultimate and the inner life is not the final statement. There has to be an integration of both in order to achieve total fulfilment.

Watering the roots of spirituality

There is a story of a family in which only a mother and her child lived. The mother had a very intense love





for plants. She kept many different varieties of plants indoors and also nurtured a beautiful garden with trees, flowers, fruits and shrubs. Her son was really only a little boy, but he also helped to look after the plants. One day the mother had to go out of town. Knowing she would be away for a few days, she asked her son to look after the plants as best as he could. The child assured his mother he would definitely look after them. She placed her trust in him and left for her journey.

When she returned a week later, she found that most of her plants were looking dull and wilted. She was sad. She called her son and asked, "Did you look after the plants?" He said, "Yes mother, I took every possible care to see that your plants survive." The mother asked, "How did you look after them?" The child said, "Every morning I would clean all the leaves, flowers and fruits with a cloth. If I saw any insects I would remove them. I have really worked hard. I don't know why they are looking so dull." The mother asked, "Did you water them?" The son said, "I forgot that!"

This story relates to our life because we take care of the external growth, but we do not take care of the inner growth. We have never watered the roots which extend deep into our mind and cannot be seen. The water which has to be given to this plant of life is not pleasure, but spiritual awareness. This water of spirituality has to be poured on the ground of the mind so that the psychic roots can derive force from it and sustain the external life. The moment this is made possible in our life, realization is not far away, ecstasy is not far away and God is not far away. This is not just my statement; it has been said by saints and seers in all ages, but still this idea has not taken root

in our lives. We still find ourselves very much involved in external experiences and interactions.

The entire system of science has been geared to deal with the external manifestations of our life. However, there have been other systems of thought which have emphasized that along with the external manifestations of the trunk, leaves, fruits and flowers, one has to look after and understand the internal manifestations so that the roots which extend under the earth are also taken care of. This is true spirituality: the ability to take care of the seen and the unseen both at the same time.

A practical approach

According to the yogic system, the human personality has two dimensions: one which thrives externally and the other which evolves internally. The practices of yoga aim at providing the understanding and knowledge of both dimensions. Yogis have experienced that when there is an integration of the human faculties, the expressions of life change and there is greater fulfilment and satisfaction.

There is a statement in the Upanishads that we come from total fulfilment and we go towards total fulfilment.

*Poornamadah poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate
Poornasya poornamaadaaya poornamevaa vashishyate*

The human being is a complete and fulfilled being, but there are different processes and states of experience. It may be said that we experience or live in four distinct dimensions. A human being is guided by the strengths of character, the weaknesses of the human personality and by the ambitions and needs which govern our lives. Let us look at these four aspects individually in order to understand the entire process.

First, the needs which are the necessities of our lives. The body has certain needs in order to sustain and maintain itself. A clear example is food. Without food and drink the body would not be able to sustain itself. In the same way, in our external social life there are certain needs: financial, emotional, intellectual and so on. In order to sustain ourselves and have a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment, there has to be fulfilment of these needs.

We utilize the strengths of our character to fulfil these needs. These strengths represent the qualities which help a human being progress in life. It could be willpower, a special talent, it could even be clarity of thought. These are the strengths we constantly utilize in our daily life. At the same time, we are confronted by certain weaknesses of our personality. These weaknesses can be insecurities, fears, mental conflicts, emotional imbalances, physical imbalances or psychological problems.

The motivating force behind the performance of an action is ambition. Ambition should not be thought of negatively, but it should be seen in the form of desire which we wish to fulfil. Thus, there are four areas of life which have to be brought in balance through yoga in order to achieve fulfilment.

I am trying to present a very practical approach to yoga. When we become aware of our weaknesses, we become aware of the imbalances within our personality. Imbalances in the body create illness and disease. Imbalances in the mind create mental conflict, anxiety, stress and depression. When the imbalances in the mind are not contained, they create deep psychological problems, which are known as *samskaras* in yoga. *Samskaras* are the unconscious expressions of human



personality. In order to deal with them, yoga has devised certain systems of practice. Hatha yoga for example, is one system; raja yoga is another system. What are known all over the world as asanas and pranayamas are practices of yoga to help find this physical balance. The body has to be managed properly. Although we take our body for granted, there are certain areas which we have to consider very carefully, such as accumulation of stress in different parts of the body. Postural stress, for example, can create physical as well as mental imbalance. When these imbalances are not dealt with immediately, they create further problems.

Yoga therapy

There is a word in English known as disease. It is made up of two words, 'dis' meaning disturbed and 'ease' meaning comfort. When the comfortable and natural state of the body is disturbed, when the ease of the body is disturbed, then disease is experienced. Although yoga does not claim that it can alleviate or cure diseases or illnesses, it has been found that through regular practice, many conditions are helped.

In this field of body management, yoga has been recognized in many parts of the world as holding great therapeutic potential. For example, in Australia a lot of research has been done in cancer therapy, and it has been found that many cases of cancer have been helped through the practices of yoga. In fact, the Cancer Research Foundation of Australia has incorporated yoga therapy in the management of cancer in several cases. In many other parts of the world, medical professionals are looking into the therapeutic values of yogic practices.

I will not go into detail about these researches, but it should be clear that there is potential to manage many

different diseases and illnesses which are physical in nature through the practices of *asanas*, yogic postures, and *pranayamas*, yogic breathing techniques.

Relaxation

When the body is harmonized and brought into balance with the practices of asanas and pranayamas, it is similar to cleaning the leaves of a plant with a cloth externally. Thereafter, we begin to work with the mind, which is like the root of the plant.

In this process, the first training which we receive is of relaxation. Relaxation is an art. It is not something which we can achieve any time, anywhere. Relaxation is a discipline. It is not sleep, because research has shown that even during sleep there can be high levels of stress in the brain and mind. It is quite obvious that when we go to bed we are not alone; we go to bed with our daily problems. We may sleep, but the problems continue to affect the normal states of brain and mind; therefore, relaxation is never achieved. Even if it is achieved, it is never complete and deep. Thus, relaxation is an art which has to be mastered.

In order to perfect the art of relaxation, you only have to spend ten minutes every day, during which you are able to let go of the stresses accumulated within yourself and develop inner harmony. The mental aspect of yoga, which is comprised of the techniques of pratyahara, plays a vital role in achieving this.

The concept of spirituality

Before I explain what pratyahara is, I want to tell you in brief the meaning of yoga. People believe that yoga is a spiritual science and those who have studied some literature on yoga say it is a process of controlling the patterns of mind. However, if you study one of the major

treatises on yoga, the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, the very first sutra states that yoga is a form of discipline. The word which has been used to describe discipline is a very peculiar one. The word in Sanskrit is *anushasana*. It has been translated as discipline, but it does not mean discipline. *Shasan* means to govern, to rule, and *anu* means the subtle aspect, the subtle dimensions. Therefore, the meaning of the sutra is 'governing the subtle aspects of human personality is yoga'. Once you are able to govern the subtle aspects of the personality, you can do anything.

It is here that we have to look into the practices of yoga in relation to how they help alter the human personality. First, they give one the ability to relax; second, they give one the ability to develop the awareness and to observe what is happening; third, they concentrate or focus the dissipated forces of personality and mind; fourth, they allow realization of the dormant faculties of human personality; and fifth, they bring about utilization of these dormant potentials for bettering one's life. Therefore, the concept of spirituality in yoga encompasses the body, the mind and the psychic dimension.

When we begin with the practice of relaxation, we are releasing the barriers and the stress created within the mind. (The mind is a very powerful force. Pleasures are experienced in the mind; pain and sorrow is first experienced in the mind, and even the highest spiritual experience is first experienced in the mind.) The mind is the base which has to be properly tuned and therefore yoga lays a great emphasis on management of the mind – not control of the mind, but management of the mind or mental forces. I do not agree with the statement, "Control the mind". I agree with the statement,

"Manage the mind". With the process of relaxation, we gradually prepare the base of the mind.

Concentration

The entire spectrum of mind is categorized into four parts in yoga: intellect, emotion, feeling and the psychic dimension. Intellect is a tool which we always use in life. Emotion is a tool which guides the performance of mind and the senses. Feeling is a tool which gives us deeper and subtle realizations. Psychic awareness is a tool which brings us closer to the unknown areas of our personality. In order to manage these areas, we have to begin with simple practices of concentration.

Concentration is an important area which has to be understood properly. Concentration is an effortless achievement. It is a state of mind in which there is total mental clarity, clarity of perception, clarity of behaviour and interaction. These three lead to mental concentration and concentration has to be a flowing state of realization or mind in which there is absolutely no tension. Even the word attention suggests be 'at-tension', and many people confuse concentration with attention.

Concentration means relaxed one-pointed awareness. This is achieved with the basic practices of yoga in which we learn to focus the mind. When the mind is focused and becomes one-pointed, then the faculties of mind awaken. When we turn on the light, the light spreads everywhere, but if by some process we are able to focus the entire light into one point, it becomes a laser beam. It gains strength and potential.

As children we used to play around with a magnifying glass trying to burn pieces of paper or straw. That is a very good example of how the mental energies can be

focused to become as powerful as a laser beam. When we are able to do that, the sharpness of mind increases, the potential of mind increases, and certain changes take place in the human personality. These changes happen at the level of human qualities. The qualities which evolve in life are then not restricted to the selfish nature, but become more universal. The qualities which we aspire for, those of compassion, love and affection, are not conditioned. They become universal and then the process of realization begins.

Yogic realization

Yogic realization is knowledge plus perfection plus understanding plus utilization. These are the different aspects of realization. Realization is not an intellectual concept; it is a state of transformation of human nature. It is a state of understanding of human nature, in which divinity is experienced in the humanness of life. This is the culmination of yoga.

I do not agree with the normal understanding of the yogic term samadhi. *Samadhi* is generally translated as union or merger with the divine consciousness. If yoga means unity, then it cannot be a self-centred practice. The normal understanding is that in the state of samadhi one attains realization of God. I feel that in samadhi it is not only the realization of God which is important, but also the application of that realization externally. That is a very important aspect which every aspirant must understand: the application of realization. Only when that happens can we say, "Yes, I have completed my journey in life and attained fulfilment."

So, in the process of management of mind, through concentration we move into the state of meditation. When concentration is developed, there

Every aspirant must understand the application of realization. Only when that happens can we say, "Yes, I have completed my journey in life and attained fulfilment."

is a transformation of human qualities. With this transformation there is experience of the meditative state. In the meditative state there is a merging of the normal externalized mind with the internal mind. In yogic terminology this internal mind is known as consciousness. Although intellectually we can say that there is very little difference between mind and consciousness, yoga says there is a difference. Mind relates to the world of senses, objects, time and space whereas consciousness relates to the continuity of human understanding and experience. It is this continuity of human experience which makes one aware of one's higher potentials. This is the evolutionary process of an individual and also of humanity. It is this consciousness which is ultimately realized with the practices of yoga. If we are able to give yoga a chance in our life, we shall win.



A process of understanding

Do not relate yoga with me personally. I am a yoga teacher, but I am also a sannyasin. A sannyasin is a person who is dedicated to the cause of spiritual knowledge. Sannyasa is my personal affair; it has nothing to do with any of you. Yoga is the affair which relates me with you and you with me.

Yoga is not a form of belief, dogma or religion; rather, it is a process of understanding the necessities of life and the management of mind and human potentials. In brief, this has been the process of yoga which I have described. Of course, there are many other aspects of yoga and to perfect or even acquire knowledge of the different yogas is a lifelong process. However, a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

I hope that I have been able to express to you my views on yoga and how it can help us in our lives. It helps in the management of our body providing physical balance and harmony through the practices of physical techniques such as asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas. They allow one to channel the physical forces, giving the ability to deal with the manifest mind. Yoga helps in the management of imbalances caused by the lack of control over the mental faculties through the practices of relaxation and concentration. And finally, it gives one the ability to use the human potential through the practices of meditation. When this is attained, a beautiful transformation takes place in life. Our guru, Swami Satyananda, says that life is a flowering mystery and every unfoldment is beautiful. We have to be aware of these unfoldments if we want to see the beauty and enjoy life. Therefore, it is my request that all of you give yoga a chance in your life.

Hari Om Tat Sat



The Science of Mantra

Torino, October 1994

Hari Om Tat Sat

Mantra means a force which can free the mind from its normal states of identification and patterns of behaviour, and which allows greater creativity and receptivity of the mind to manifest when it is perfected. A mantra is a sound vibration and sound vibrations can alter the vibratory field of the body, brain and mind. The sound vibrations known as mantras relate to the different psychic centres or chakras in the human body. They are combinations of different sounds, consonants and vowels.

With the repetition of a mantra, a certain change is experienced gradually in the human personality. The first experience is of mental tranquillity, along with relaxation and the focusing of attention. Then there is a gradual development of concentration, whereby sensory perceptions are isolated from their normal attraction to the world of objects and are focused internally. There, a new awareness, a new acceptance dawns about oneself. Relaxation is the first stage; concentration is the second stage; releasing deep inner stresses is the third stage and allowing creativity to manifest is the fourth stage of mantra practice.

There have been many traditions, in India as well as elsewhere, which feel that mantras are religious by nature, but yoga does not believe that to be true. According to the practices and principles of kundalini

yoga, there are different psychic centres in our body. Each psychic centre or chakra represents a specific manifestation of energy and consciousness. As we develop these different psychic centres, we go through altered states of perception.

These altered states of mind or perception are not something to be afraid of. Sleep is an altered state of mind; pleasure and pain are altered states of mind. An altered state means a state which is different from the normal activity of the mind and which dominates the performance of the senses, intellect and emotions. Therefore, when we speak of altered states in yoga, we are speaking of states in which we come to terms with our mind and use the qualities of mind in our daily life. The psychic centres are activated with sound vibrations, thus affecting the brain as well as the mind.

Mantra sadhana

In order to practise mantra, there are some basic disciplines which we should try to understand and follow. To use mantra as part of your *sadhana*, or regular practice, the system is different. For this you have to find at least ten minutes of time for yourself. In the span of twenty-four hours it is definitely possible to devote ten minutes for your own development. Whether it is in the morning, afternoon or evening does not really matter, but those ten minutes belong to you only and not to the world, the family or any other person. They do not belong to your likes and dislikes, ambitions and desires, but they are dedicated to your inner harmony and development.

In those ten minutes, first sit down, either on a chair or on the floor, wherever you are most comfortable.

Become aware of the body, close your eyes, and allow the body to become stable, comfortable and relaxed. After you have observed your body, focus your attention in the region of the eyebrow centre. Allow your mind to rest while focusing in the region of the eyebrow centre. When the mind is relaxed, then begin the mantra meditation.

Mantra meditation begins with visualizing your chosen symbol in front of the closed eyes. The symbol is the point on which the mental faculties are focused to avoid distractions of mind. You are not likely to see the symbol very clearly in the first try. At first it is a process of imagination, but gradually with greater focusing of attention, you will eventually be able to see a shady, hazy form of the symbol. As the concentration develops, that hazy image will become clearer and more colourful.

When you are able to focus on the image of the symbol, then begin with mental repetition of the mantra. Gradually try to merge your entire attention in the repetition of the mantra and try not to think "How soon can I finish so I can go about my daily business?" Just try to merge yourself in the repetition of the mantra. This practice is done for about five to seven minutes every day as part of your *sadhana*.

The practice is timed with a mala. Traditionally, the mala is held in the right hand between the ring finger and the thumb, while the middle finger moves one bead at a time. One bead, one breath and one mantra are combined together and this provides the timing. Initially, in order to become used to the practice, do one complete mala. Later on, as you develop a liking for it and become used to the mantra, you can increase the number of malas. From one you can go up to two,



three, four, five, or as many as you like, depending on your experience, your inclination and your sense of comfort with your mantra. This form of practice is done as part of regular sadhana.

The other method is to repeat the mantra mentally whenever you want, any time, whether you are sitting, travelling, sleeping, walking, talking, dreaming. Whenever you remember the mantra, repeat it just for one minute, then go about your business. You can do this even while you are working. You will find that in this way you will gain a lot of self-confidence as well as mental energy to complete and fulfil whatever you are doing. This dynamic mantra meditation realigns the inner vibratory structure at any time. If you are walking in the park you can adjust the mantra with your steps and breath for just a minute or two. You will derive great benefit from such a practice too. So, these are the two main methods of mantra practice.

Atomic vibrations

In the course of their studies, the yogis have evolved a different kind of understanding of human personality. We are not here to see who is right and who is wrong, but we are here to experience the subtle dimensions of our personality as the yogis have discovered it, and I am going to tell you about this in brief.

The yogis realized that the human personality is primarily composed of vibrations. The body and the mind and their various expressions are governed by subtle vibratory forces. About five thousand years ago, there was a saint, a yogi, whose name was Kanaad. He was one of the first to discover and talk about the atomic structure of a human being. Just as in the modern age we consider Einstein to be the father of

the atomic theory, in spirituality we consider Sage Kanaad to be the original propagator of the atomic theory.

In his treatise, Sage Kanaad has described the exact atomic structure just as science describes it today. Of course the terms are in Sanskrit, but the theories and experiments are modern and scientific in nature. He explains that the body is composed of atoms and that they are in a state of vibration. He also says that the entire elemental structure of the universe is made up of different atoms which are vibrating in their own frequencies, and the density and compression of these atoms give birth to different elements.

He has also said that many of these atoms are not only physical, but also subtle in nature, and their quality changes when they become subtle. He has called these physical atoms *anu* and described the subtle atomic formation in the form of *shakti*. Within the atom there is pulsation of energy, and within the pulsation of energy there is existence of the spirit. Thus, every part of the body and mind has the inbuilt capacity to realize the spirit. Therefore for him, spiritual experiences are not only mental or intellectual processes, but a phenomenon in which every part of the body and mind vibrates with that spiritual realization.

I have mentioned about Sage Kanaad's principles to bring your attention to one particular point, that the subtle energy in our body relates to the chakras which are seen in the psychic body.

Five koshas

Yoga recognizes five areas of human manifestation known as koshas. *Kosha* means a form, a shape, a

sheath. The physical body which is composed of matter, of dense elements, is known as *annamaya kosha*. The mental body composed of subtle elements is known as *manomaya kosha*. The dimension of energy governing the body and mind is known as *pranamaya kosha*. The dimension of intuitive knowledge and wisdom, experiential knowledge, is known as *vijnanamaya kosha*. And when the entire body experiences joy and bliss, that is known as *anandamaya kosha*. These are the five dimensions of human experience that represent the total human personality.

In *annamaya kosha*, the dimension of matter, our body is seen and experienced. The functions of the different parts of the body, senses and organs belong to *annamaya kosha*. In *manomaya kosha* we have the manifestation of rationality, feeling, emotions, attitudes and behaviour. In *pranamaya kosha* we have the interaction of energy. In *vijnanamaya kosha* we have the realization of intuitive faculties which represent understanding and knowledge of the dimensions which are beyond normal human perceptions. Finally, in *anandamaya kosha*, there is a total integration of the human nature; it is the human experience of the cosmic nature, or the cosmic experience.

Tuning the personality with mantra

All these different states of the yogic personality can be influenced by vibrations. The mind can be altered by vibrations. The physical state can be changed by vibrations. The physical cells can be revitalized by vibrations, and the unknown areas of the mind can be awakened by vibrations. The external form of these vibrations can be experienced in music, for example. Music creates a definite change in the human



personality. There are some forms of music which can stimulate the body, mind, feelings and emotions. There are other forms of music which can pacify the agitated states of the entire personality.

When I use the word 'personality' I do not mean the normal personality referred to in psychology and science. Here, personality has to be understood in the yogic sense, which is combining all the five dimensions of human experience together, combining all the five koshas together, from matter right up to spirit.

The yogis thought, "If vibrations can alter the different states of body and mind, then can there be a process by which we can awaken the dormant faculties through vibrations and come closer to our inner self?"

In the process of their studies and discoveries they came upon the science of mantra. Just as certain sound frequencies can stimulate or pacify the activities of human personality, in the same way certain guided vibrations can alter the functions of human nature. This understanding gave birth to the science of kundalini yoga along with the science of mantra.

Mantra yoga is the science of understanding the effect of vibrations as they influence the human personality, and kundalini yoga is the science of experiencing the altered states of consciousness awakened with the power of mantras. So, we will look into these two aspects, mantra and kundalini yoga.

The word *mantra* means liberation of the mental forces by use of a sound vibration. Mantras are vibrations which we give to ourselves. For example, the chanting of *Om*. One can relate to the mantra *Om* intellectually or religiously, but the actual effect

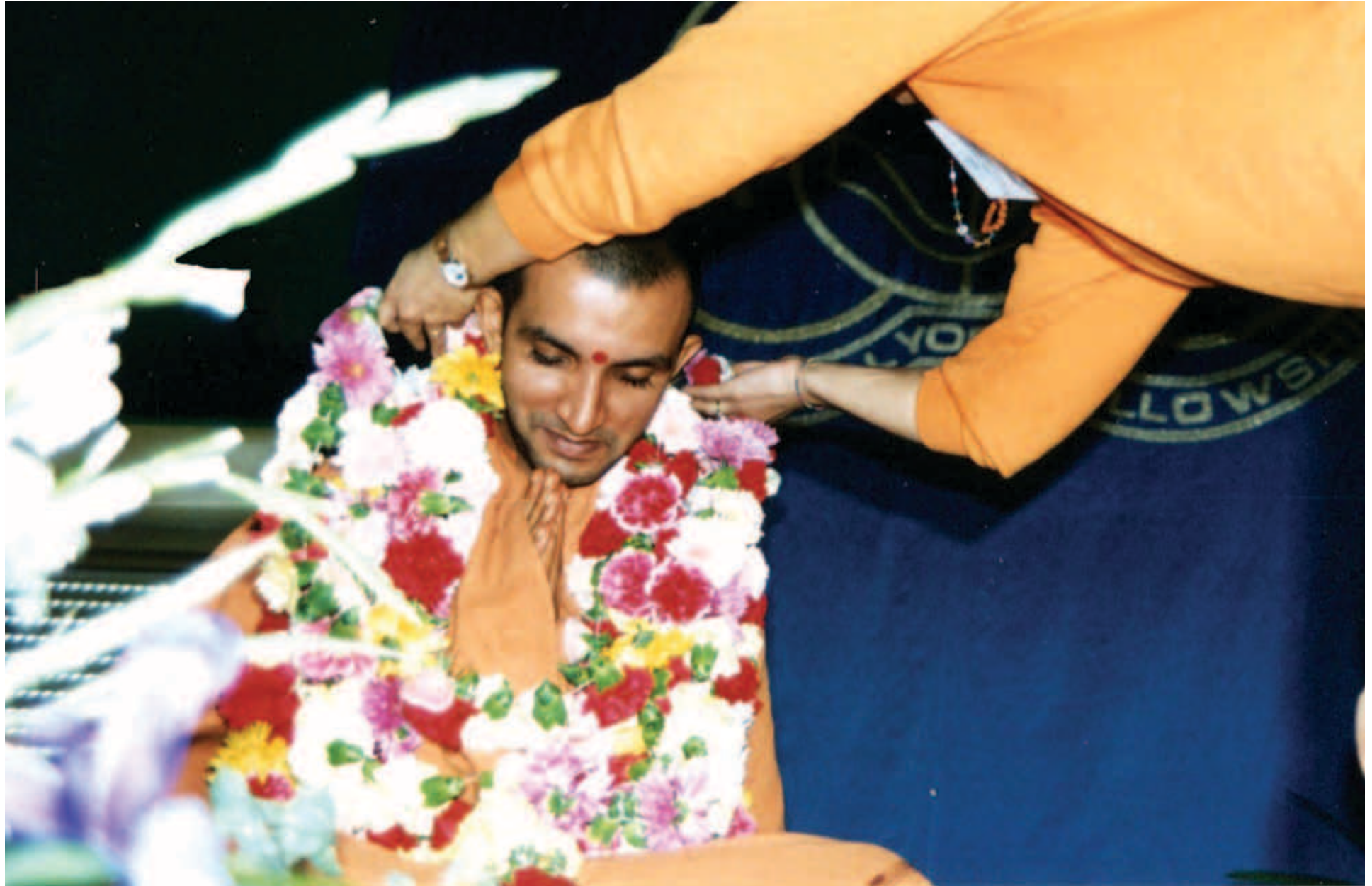
of chanting the mantra *Om* is understood with the awakening of the human psyche.

Research into effects of mantra

When I was in Barcelona in 1978, we conducted a research project in a hospital to explain the effect of mantra on the human body and brain. The purpose of the research was to relax the patients going in for surgery at the hospital. Prior to surgery, they were put in a room where they had to chant *Om* for five minutes. Their brain waves, skin resistance and heartbeat were monitored scientifically. The result was very interesting.

The hyperactivity of the brain reduced and there was an increase of alpha and delta waves within just five minutes of chanting *Om*. There was relaxation of the nervous agitations in the body, which could be monitored by the blood pressure and skin resistance. Subjectively, the patients felt a great reduction in their level of fear. You know, when we go to a hospital for surgery, there is always anxiety, and fear becomes predominant. The patients experienced a great reduction in these states of anxiety and fear, and there was a greater ability to cope with their disturbed mental states. These results were not anything new. They were exactly what the yogis had mentioned thousands of years ago.

When a proper combination of sound vibrations is made, the mind and the psyche interact with the body and there is greater harmony. When there is harmony between body, external mind and psyche, it leads to greater states of relaxation and with relaxation there is awakening of the dormant mental potentials. In



states of stress and tension, we are unable to use the mental faculties properly. In states of anxiety and stress, there is a great reduction of our normal mental clarity. However, with the repetition of mantra there is an increase in mental awareness, alertness and other faculties.

Influencing the psyche

It has also been experienced that when the mind is finely tuned, the psychic experiences merge with mental experiences. This is a very important aspect, the merger of mental faculties with psychic faculties.

We may ask, what is the difference between mental and psychic faculties? Yoga says that mind is the manifest area of human personality which interacts with the world of senses, object, space and time. The psychic dimension of human personality does not interact with object, space or time. It does not interact with the senses. It maintains its own identity and it connects with the unknown dimension of human personality, the anandamaya kosha. So, the mind interacts with manomaya kosha and annamaya kosha, whereas the psychic aspect of our nature interacts with vijnanamaya kosha and anandamaya kosha.

With the combination of sound vibrations, or mantras, we begin to influence the psyche through the mind. Our manifest or external mind, which is related to annamaya kosha and manomaya kosha, experiences pleasure and sorrow, desire and action. Action is the result of desire, and pain and pleasure are opposite forces. With repetition of mantra, harmony of mind is experienced, where it does not fluctuate between the two opposites. When the mental fluctuations reduce



and eventually stop, we transcend the mind and enter the psyche. Therefore, the immediate results of mantra practice are seen in the form of relaxation and an increase in one-pointedness.

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One-pointedness means focusing of energies in one direction through manifestation of human effort and creativity. This process leads to realization of the psyche.

This realization of the psyche begins with the awakening of chakras and kundalini, which is the subject of kundalini yoga. In the yogic personality there are areas or states of different experiences. These different levels of experiences are described in the form of chakras, where the energy manifests in a certain form. The corresponding mental state or consciousness also manifests in a certain form, giving birth to a specific quality of creativity.

Creativity is a very broad term and within creativity there are different areas where one can excel. In each level of creativity there is a different unfoldment of human potential and consciousness. Ultimately, we go through seven states of transformation within our personality, related with the seven chakras from mooladhara to sahasrara.

Systems of mantra practice

In mantra meditation there are different systems of practice which can lead one to that depth and awareness, from mind into psyche. We shall look at the various practices of mantra meditation in brief.

First of all, in order to influence the physical states of the body, the mantra is practised verbally. For example, one may sit down and repeat *Om Namah Shivaya*, or one can sing it in the form of kirtan, or it can be played on a tape recorder so that the entire body is subjected to the effect of the sound vibrations.

In order to alter and influence the different mental states the mantra has to be practised mentally. It is

natural that when we begin to repeat the mantra mentally with introversion of mind, we experience drowsiness, lethargy and sleep because we are not used to states of introversion in our normal life. So, when we feel that we have become introverted and lethargy is taking over the mental state of alertness, we should begin to repeat the mantra by whispering it.

In order to make the mantra a part of daily activity, you can even repeat it while performing any other duty which does not involve concentration. For example, you should not try to practise your mantra while driving the car. At this stage you also need to be more with yourself, not only in order to practise the mantra, but also to experience the mental state given to you by the mantra at a particular moment.

Once you have perfected the practice up to this level, in order to go deeper into your own personality, the mantra is combined with different symbols, or yantras or mandalas, or other techniques of meditation such as *trataka*. Mantra, when combined with the techniques of *pratyahara* and *dharana*, becomes a very powerful stimulating tool for the psyche. Much can be said about it because it is a complete science in itself, but in brief it should be understood that the use of mantra is to ultimately realize the human potential contained in the various chakras.

When these centres of energy and consciousness become active in our life, life changes from normal to supernormal. That is the state of the superbeing as it has been described by Sri Aurobindo. For the yogi, Superman does not exist only in comics, it is a reality. This is in brief about the practice of mantra in relation to our personality and practice.

Hari Om Tat Sat

The Meditative Process

Rimini, October 1994

Hari Om Tat Sat

Please sit down comfortably wherever you are. Keep your spine straight and gently close your eyes. Gently place the hands on top of the thighs or on top of the knees, and gradually relax your whole physical body.

Mentally observe the physical posture. Become aware of the areas of tension and tightness in the body. Allow yourself to be comfortable and relaxed. Move your awareness from one part of the body to the next, and observe yourself the posture in which you are sitting. Imagine that there is a full-length mirror in front of you and mentally see the reflection of your whole body as you are at present.

Develop awareness of yourself and gradually become aware of the natural breath. Just be aware that 'I am breathing in, I am breathing out'. Do not force yourself to breathe in or to breathe out, but observe the natural breath within the nostrils. When you inhale you will feel a slight cool sensation and when you exhale there will be a slight warm sensation. Focus your mind in this experience by gradually withdrawing it from the external environment and from the body. As you become more deeply involved in this observation, you will notice that the physical body has become more relaxed and still, and you will also notice that the mental activities have lessened and the mind is focusing itself.

Now focus your attention in the region of the eyebrow centre and imagine or visualize a burning candle flame there. Keep your attention focused on the image of the candle flame. Maintain the awareness of the natural breath and be aware of the gradual relaxation of body and mind. Remain in silence for a

few moments. In the stillness of body and mind you will become aware of the underlying silence.

Continue to observe the image of the candle flame in front of the eyebrow centre. Merge your entire awareness in the experience, in the feeling of silence, and of physical and mental stillness.



Gradually externalize the mind. Slowly and gently move your body and open your eyes.

The process of meditation

In the yogic system, meditation is not achieved instantaneously; rather, there is a gradual process of withdrawing the mind. In raja yoga this has been explained in the form of three stages of meditation.

The first stage of meditation is known as *pratyahara*. *Pratyahara* means feeding the inner senses and it has also been translated as withdrawing the senses. The second stage is known as *dharana*, which means fixation of mental attention on one point. The third stage is known as *dhyana*, which is often translated as the meditative state, but it literally means fusion of the mind with the object of contemplation. It is in this context that we have to understand the meditative process. It has to be understood that we cannot bypass the mind when we begin to practice meditation, for we lack the basic training and the mental discipline to do so.

Training the mind with pratyahara

Initially, we have to practise *pratyahara*, where we gradually train the mind to recognize itself. The mind has to recognize its activities and manifestations. An apt description of *pratyahara* is that it is like a turtle withdrawing its limbs into its shell. How many limbs does a turtle withdraw into the shell? Two arms, two legs, the tail and the head. The first five represent the five senses, and the head represents the mind, the mental activity.

The senses, by nature, are attracted to objects from which they derive pleasure, and the mind fluctuates

from one object to the next. There are two tendencies of the mind: attraction and repulsion. When there is attraction, there is the feeling of pleasure and when there is repulsion, there is the feeling of disconnection or pain. In order to gain the ability to withdraw our senses from external objects, first there has to be an understanding of the nature of the objects to which the senses are attracted. So, before any kind of withdrawal, there has to be an extension of the mental faculties.

The extension of the mental faculties and the sensory faculties is the first stage of *pratyahara*, which we practise by becoming aware of the sensory inputs, by extending the mind to recognize the sounds, skin sensations, smells and tastes. In this way, there is an extension of awareness into the senses and their objects of attraction. Once there is an awareness of the immediate environment which we are attracted to at any given moment, we gradually begin to isolate ourselves from those sense objects and begin to focus internally at one point.

Focusing and channelling with dharana

The focusing of attention at one point takes place in three different levels: the space of the head, the space of the heart, and the space of the lower body or *mooladhara* region. Initially, we concentrate in the space of the head. Normally the faculties of the head are dominant and it is this area which we have to be aware of first and control. After the head activity and the head space has been harmonized and balanced, we move on to the heart space. This focusing of attention which one experiences is known as *dharana*.

In *dharana*, the mind and the senses have been isolated from their external attractions and objects, and are being focused in one experience. There are many practices which can take one from the superficial or the preliminary techniques of concentration to deeper techniques or levels of concentration.

Once there is total harmony in the head space and in the heart space, when we have been able to channel the force of the intellect and the force of emotion, then we deal with the force of instinct. There are four basic instincts which have to be channelled: *ahara*, meaning craving for satisfaction; *maithuna*, or the sexual instinct; *bhaya*, or fear of the unknown; and *nidra*, or isolation from the senses and the mind. *Nidra* literally means sleep. What happens when we go to sleep? There is disconnection of the mind from the senses and the external world. When that disconnection takes place, the quality of mental experience changes. Thus, four instinctive forces have to be channelled in the state of *dharana*. When these are channelled, we move into meditation.

Moving into dhyana

Meditation, or *dhyana*, is not a practice; rather, it is a state of mind in which a merger takes place between the experiencer and the experience, between the experience and the process of experience. It is at this stage that meditation actually becomes a living understanding of human consciousness. I am using the phrase 'living understanding of human consciousness' for a definite reason. It is easy to have an intellectual concept, to experiment with certain things and evolve an understanding of them, but it is an art to be in one continuous state of conscious harmony.





There are three things here: philosophy, science and yoga. You can experiment with science and come to an understanding. A philosophy is an idea which you may enjoy, but which you can never understand fully. Yoga is the combination of both, and it is this yoga which we have to understand through meditation.

In yoga we understand the application of the higher realization in our daily life. This is what needs to be achieved in meditation, otherwise it is not meditation; it is mental fantasy. Mental fantasy can take any shape, form or dimension. However, it has to be understood that in order to experience the purity of the self, the purity of consciousness, one has to go through the mind. This is the effort which we need to understand and live in the practices or states of pratyahara and dharana.

Yoga does not aim for experiences; rather, it aims for effort. Take hunger for example. If there is food in front of you, how will you satisfy your hunger? By feeding yourself. When the hunger is satisfied, that is the experience. However, the effort, the movement which you have made to pick up the food, put it in the mouth, chew it and swallow it – that is the process of yoga. So, the effort which we make in order to go deeper into our own being, is the effort of pratyahara and dharana, and the final fulfilment is to be experienced in dhyana.

A process of self-discovery

It is necessary for every individual to practise these various stages of concentration and meditation in their daily life. In order to do this, it is necessary that we spare some time for ourselves. I am sure that we can all afford ten to fifteen minutes out of twenty-four hours and dedicate them to our development.

One has to begin with something very simple and basic so these practices become a process of self-discovery. Begin with the body. Begin with understanding and realizing the different states of the senses, the different sensory experiences. Try to acquire a complete knowledge of the sensory interaction between the body and the brain. This will bring an increased degree of awareness into your own perceptions. In the course of time, when you are aware of the different activities and interactions in the body, the attention will automatically divert itself to the experience of mind.

How do we deal with the mind? First, by acknowledging and observing the sensory activity within the mind, then by understanding our thought patterns, then by understanding our emotional patterns, then by understanding the subconscious and unconscious manifestations, and then we move into the psychic dimension. This is the process which we can easily follow in our daily lives. I am sure that you will be very successful if you follow this simple system.

Follow one simple system. It is no use digging twenty holes, one foot deep, with the hope of finding water. It is better to dig one hole, twenty feet deep. Digging in one place is the purpose of meditation.

Let us take the first step tonight. When you go to bed tonight, and for the following month, just do one practice. Lie on your bed, you do not even have to sit up. Just be comfortable, lie flat, and mentally observe the entire activity of the day, starting from the time you woke up till the time you came to bed. See the day in the form of a movie in your mind and know the activities you have performed from moment to moment.

During this process, you will come across many things which you would have missed in the day: in attitudes, behaviour, interactions, speech and performance. Find out where you have excelled yourself and where you have made certain mistakes, and say to yourself, “Tomorrow I will try not to make these mistakes.” I can assure you that within a month your entire perception will change. You will become very aware and creative. This will be the first step in the meditative process. Just keep at it until you are able to perfect inner purification and you will come across yourself. It will be a process of self-discovery and when you have discovered your self, nothing else remains to be known.

Hari Om Tat Sat

*One has to begin with something
very simple and basic so these
practices become a process of self-
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Begin with understanding and
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the senses, the different sensory
experiences.*

Satsang

Rimini, October 1994

Q. For nine years I have been practising yoga with intensity but I'm still caught by passions and attachment to the pleasures of life and this makes me suffer because I would like to feel more detached from all this. What can I do to proceed with serenity on the path?

Swamiji: First of all, stop feeling guilty. There is a statement in the Upanishads which says that God created this world, and His presence can be felt everywhere in the world. For those who live in the world He has created pleasures. These pleasures may give happiness or culminate in pain, but nevertheless they are pleasures for the senses and the mind. Those who live in the world constantly interact with these pleasures. Therefore, continue to experience pleasures, but with clarity of mind and detachment, and continue to evolve. Two concepts are given here: continuation of enjoyment and detachment.

From the question it seems that although the questioner has been practising yoga for nine years or more he or she has not come to terms with himself or herself. There is a split between the understanding of yoga and involvement with life in the world. My request to you is that you do not look at yoga merely in the form of a practice, but as a life process.

If you are able to see yoga as a life process, then every action will become part of karma yoga, every understanding will be part of jnana yoga, every effort that you make will be part of raja yoga and every

experience that you have will become part of dhyana yoga. It is with this understanding that you must try to include yoga in your life. No doubt there are attractions and repulsions in life which give pleasure and pain, but do not allow yourself to be pushed down by them. Rather, try to be the master of your pleasure and pain, and have a greater understanding and better alignment with yourself. Instead of struggling, flow.

Q. Many of us find it difficult to go through the stage of pratyahara without losing awareness. Why?

Swamiji: This question is being asked a bit too early; I haven't finished my talk on pratyahara, dharana and dhyana yet. I mentioned to you that we will discuss the *gunas*, the natural qualities with which we come into this world. Normally the *gunas* are divided into three groups: tamasic, rajasic and sattwic.

Tamasic generally has negative connotations for us, meaning bad, limiting, restricting, lethargic, dull, but the actual meaning of *tamas* is stagnation. This stagnation is the result of being conditioned to one particular pattern of thinking and living. Trying to be secure is a tamasic tendency because we do not want to change the state of security. If a change comes about, there is fear and conflict.

Rajasic also has similar connotations. In a negative sense it is domination of the self, but the nature of *rajas* is dynamism. All our ambitions, desires, actions and thoughts are rajasic by nature, where we seek to fulfil the needs of the ego, the limited self. That self-centred awareness is *rajas*. Fearing change and becoming insecure because of change is *tamas*. Expanded awareness is *sattwa*.

People always like to have a positive self-image. You and I are both included in this. If someone says something good about us, we feel happy. If someone says something bad about us, we retire into our shell to create a sense of comfort within our own mind. In *pratyahara* we have to recognize our weaknesses and our strengths. It is not a process of closing the eyes and going within, it is a process of recognizing one's nature, quality and behaviour. In this process there is no doubt that one can go beyond the state of *pratyahara* without losing consciousness.

If we think that by closing the eyes and withdrawing the senses we can go beyond the practices of *pratyahara*, we will make mistakes because there is an absence of understanding of the *gunas* in our life. There will be no recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of human nature and human personality. So, in the preliminary stages of *pratyahara* we become aware of our strengths and use them to progress further; we become aware of our weaknesses and transform them into positive qualities. This is how we move into the state of *dharana*.

Q. Should the sequences of asana and pranayama take into consideration the weather? Why do young people prefer to practise more complex asanas rather than pawanmuktasana?

Swamiji: There are two questions here. Let's first look at the first one, the practice of asana and pranayama and the weather.

In the rules of asana practice, yoga says that they should be performed in a temperature which does not create disturbance in the natural state of the body. The

body should not experience extremes of temperature during asana practice. Remember, the system of yoga has evolved in a hot country. Therefore, the tradition goes that one practises asana early in the morning when the atmosphere is cool and pleasant.

If you try and apply the same rule in Greenland, it will be inappropriate. There, afternoon would be the most suitable time unless you are practising in a heated room. As I mentioned earlier, the aim of asana is to provide relaxation and harmony in the performance and functions of the body. If there are extreme climatic deviations, then the nervous system, the skin and the circulation will be affected. This will create further stress in the physical organs, systems and functions. So, use your judgement and I am sure you will find the proper way.

With respect to the other question, why young people like to practise complex asanas and not pawanmuktasana, I would say lack of maturity is the main problem. When I was young – of course I am still young now – I used to like performing complex asanas. I would feel good that I could do them with ease; it used to boost my self-image. There are still many asanas that I can do which you cannot even dream of doing. However, after understanding the process, I feel very comfortable with pawanmuktasana. So, from my personal experience, I would say it is a matter of maturity.

Q. What do you mean by spirituality?

Swamiji: Spirituality means experience of the nature of spirit. Spirit is definitely not the mind. In fact, spirituality dawns only after you have attained a meditative state and not before that.

We learn to manage the various activities of the mind from the very beginning of the state of meditation, dhyana, and we continue to do so till its culmination. We try to develop the qualities which can be conducive to the experience of the spiritual

state. These qualities, whether love, compassion, etc., are not disciplines imposed on one's nature, though in the early stages we might try to impose certain positive attitudes on the natural state of our mind. These positive attitudes help channel our



patterns of behaviour in the right direction, but the basic nature or tendency of the mind has not been transformed. The mind has not gone through a process of purification.

One can go out and roll naked in the dirt, come back in the house and put on freshly pressed clothes. One can give the face and hands a wash, put on perfume and look clean, but by this external change have we cleaned or purified our dirty body? In order to get rid of the dirt it is necessary that we take a shower or bath. In the same way, when we try to impose certain qualities or attitudes on ourselves, it is like putting on a fresh set of clothes over an impure mind because we have not learned to deal with the negativity or the reactions of the natural mind.

Up to the stage of dhyana we try to purify the mind. After the mind is purified we experience the state of samadhi. Samadhi is the clean, pure, untainted state of body, mind and spirit. For me spirituality begins after samadhi, because by then one has learned how to deal with the mind and live that spiritual experience in day to day life. That spiritual experience then becomes a living experience, not just an intellectual concept.

If you look at Swami Anandananda's head, you will find some scars there. Do you know how he got them? No? Well, if he permits me, I will tell you the story. Ah! I have his permission. When he first came to India, he was a very rash young person and had this intense urge to realize his divine self. In the first encounter with Paramahamsaji, he said straightaway, "I want to be realized instantaneously." Paramahamsaji said "Why?" Swami Anandananda said, "Look, I come from a culture where we have instant tea and instant coffee, and I want instant realization."

Of course it was a very lengthy discussion and I will not go into the details of it, but somehow he managed (I still wonder how he did it!) to convince Paramahamsaji about the instant realization process. Paramahamsaji gave him a mantra – shall I tell them what the mantra was? Yes? With his permission I'm going to tell you what the mantra was, and you can also try it from tonight. The mantra was *Aham Brahmasmi*, which roughly means "I am Brahman, the Supreme Self." Paramahamsaji told him to repeat that until he was able to actually experience what he was repeating.

Swami Anandananda sat down and began to repeat, "*Aham Brahmasmi*, I am That, I am That, I am That", continuously for a week – of course with breaks for breakfast, lunch and dinner. When he felt that he had realized, he came to Paramahamsaji and said, "I have completed my realization." Paramahamsaji said, "We will have a test." He gave him a bag and some money and asked him to go to Munger to purchase vegetables.

Swami Anandananda very happily marched out of the gate thinking that the whole world was beautiful, divine and sublime, that not only he but everyone was part of that supreme reality. Sometimes I wonder whether he was high on LSD because he looked at a leaf, at the beautiful glow around it, and said "Ah! That also is the supreme reality." Even the road, which is made of tar, looked golden to him.

Eventually, in this state of contemplation, he reached the Munger market. There he saw everyone running here and there. So he asked one person, "Why is everyone running away?" That person said, "Look, you should also run because there is a mad elephant

in the Munger market which is trampling everything on its path."

Swami Anandananda started to think, "I am the supreme self. The elephant is also the supreme self. The whole world is part of that supreme self. What harm can a supreme self do to another supreme self? If you throw a bucket of water into the ocean what will happen? Nothing! They will merge into each other. So what harm can the supreme self of the elephant do to the supreme self of this being?" Thus, in his contemplation of the supreme self, he walked right up to the elephant. Unfortunately, the elephant was not in a philosophical mood and did not want to listen to Swami Anandananda's theories. Instead, it wrapped him up in its trunk, swung him around and threw him. Of course Swami Anandananda was hurt and he still bears the scars.

He ended up in the Munger hospital where they stitched and plastered him up and sent him back to the ashram, limping, without the vegetables. When he reached the ashram, Paramahamsaji was standing at the gate and said, "What happened?" Swami Anandananda opened a stream of Italian abuse. Luckily no one understood what he was saying. When he had quietened down, Paramahamsaji asked him to tell the whole story.

After listening to his story, about the bright, shiny golden world and the happenings in the Munger market, Paramahamsaji asked him a question, "You knew that everybody is part of that divine nature, so why did you not listen to the person who warned you? He was also divine and he was warning you to run away."

This is a story which tells us that rational understanding is poles apart from actual realization. Spiritual life is not some kind of intellectual gymnastics. It is to be experienced in life after having controlled and gone beyond the mind and the nature of mind. Therefore, spirituality begins after having perfected the states of meditation.

Q. How can one recognize a truly spiritual person?

Swamiji: If you want to recognize a truly spiritual person you do not have to look very far. Just look at the stage, and Swami Anandananda.

If you study the *Bhagavad Gita* you will find the answer to this question there. In the twelfth chapter from verse thirteen to verse twenty, the qualities of a spiritual aspirant have been described. It is a beautiful description of how a truly spiritual being lives. I will tell you about it in brief.

Without the feeling of mineness

Without the influence of ego

With total balance in pain and pleasure

With the quality of forgiveness

One who sees friends and enemies with the same vision

Is the spiritual being dear to me.

This is one verse from that description. The chapter gives an entire description of a person with spiritual qualities, a person who is said to be realized. The most important quality of such a person is the ability to surrender, the ability to surrender to the divine will and not just to one's mental whims.

When one surrenders to the divine will, the external projections in life are of compassion, love,

affection and devotion. In the life of saints and spiritual beings, apart from other qualities, we see that these four qualities are predominant: love which is not conditional, compassion which is not conditional, affection for all which is non-selfish, and devotion to God and experiencing His presence in every living being. These are the four natural qualities which evolve in the life of a spiritual aspirant apart from the others which have been mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Now you can imagine for yourself such a person who is free from the bondages of ego, in tune with the Cosmic Self, has surrendered or allowed the devotion for the Cosmic Being to manifest within. Such a person has equal vision for friend and foe and has the ability to express a natural compassion for all. It goes without saying that one rises in spiritual realization beyond the effects of attraction and repulsion.

This is not something which I have read. It is something I see every day more and more in our guru Swami Satyananda. He left the ashram on 8.8.88, after creating an empire of yoga, a chain of ashrams. One day he called me and said, "I am leaving tomorrow morning." Of course it was a matter of personal shock, but he said very clearly that although he had worked for yoga he was a sannyasin. He had worked to spread the knowledge of yoga, but that became a process to exhaust his own karmas.

When he felt that he had exhausted his karmas, what reason was there to carry on in the ashram? Just for a pleasant life? Just to have the recognition of being a guru? When he left the ashram, he left with only two dhotis that were given to him by his guru, Swami Sivananda. He did not accept any financial

help except for 108 rupees which was forcibly put in his bag by us. The person who all the statesmen used to respect left the ashram alone, unrecognized by anyone. For a long time nobody even knew where he had gone or what he was doing, or whether he was even alive.

What does this mean? If he was like one of us, he would be happy playing the role of a guru and giving guidance to his followers. He would be happy with the status and respect which he would get from everyone. But he said no to all of that, "I have not taken sannyasa for all this, I have a different purpose in life."

Of course, at that time many of us felt that we were being left without any support, because of our attachment to him. He explained very logically that asking him to stop is similar to saying to a dying father, "If you were going to die, why did you give birth to us?" This is something we would never ask our father, because we know that birth and death are realities of life which one cannot escape from. There has to come a time when we have to stand on our own feet.

In the course of time, we saw him evolve into a different kind of being. From a guru he became a siddha, and from a normal human being he was transformed into a superhuman being. I do not want to talk too much about him because it is an endless topic, but in his life I have seen these spiritual qualities manifest. I am not saying this because he is my guru, but because I have seen him with critical eyes, and despite all my inquisitive criticism I have never seen a fault in him. The qualities which have manifested in him have become the guidelines of my own life and I know that when I finish my term I will also follow the same path.

Vision of Spirituality

Rimini, October 1994

Hari Om Tat Sat

I will begin with a small story. The story begins with Paramahamsaji and why he chose the yogic movement. According to the tradition of sannyasa, we do not involve ourselves in the propagation of yoga; rather, we practise sadhana in order to evolve spiritually and to become an example of that lifestyle. This is the orthodox and traditional view of sannyasa. However, Paramahamsaji did not feel satisfied by following a self-centred sannyasa lifestyle because he had a different understanding of human nature, and that understanding is still very alive in his mind.

He knows that all of us cannot have the same rubber stamp put on our foreheads. He knows that each one of us has our limitations, and also abilities and strengths. He has accepted this nature of human beings rather than imposing a set discipline. He chose yoga as the medium to propagate a way of life in which one could come to terms with one's personality.

Swami Satyananda started teaching yoga in a very practical and systematic way. If you have read or come into contact with his teachings, you will find that he deals more with the practicalities of life and less with spiritual speculations. This is because he feels that spiritual understanding has to be an individual process of knowing the self; therefore, he propagated yoga as a means to develop the qualities of body, mind and psyche.

When he felt that the yoga movement had established itself, then he started to develop the

other aspects of service to humanity, which we see in the activities of Sivananda Math. The activities of Sivananda Math are not social service or charity; rather, through the understanding of service, he is emphasizing on realization of the potential of love, compassion, affection and devotion to all. Externally, the activities may seem to be social, but his real aim is to make us aware of these qualities internally.

We can say that it is the next stage of yoga which he is introducing through the activities of Sivananda Math, and this is practising spirituality in daily life. His method of teaching this is through yoga and service. We have always looked only superficially at our training and teaching, whereas his aim has been to make us more aware of the teachings internally. In order to facilitate this process of internal understanding, he introduced the concept of sannyasa to the western world. Because of this action he was criticized by the traditionalists in the country, but he had a purpose, a very specific purpose for introducing sannyasa into the western culture.

Paramahamsaji wanted to introduce a lifestyle which is in conformity with spiritual thought, in which absorption and application of one's strengths plays a very important part. It is a lifestyle in which the qualities of *viveka*, discrimination, and *vairagya*, not being attached to desires and personal cravings, eventually develop. It was with this idea of developing the faculties of *viveka* and *vairagya* along with the observation and application of their understanding in daily life, that he introduced sannyasa.

Paramahamsaji says that this combination of sannyasa and yoga is very valid in order to grow and attain fulfilment in life, but sometimes we face

problems in our attempt to practice this. Possibly this is due to lack of understanding or immaturity of mind.

We have to deal with three aspects of life here: the social aspect, the sannyasa aspect and the yogic aspect. If there can be a good integration of these three, then life will develop beautifully. In the social aspect we have our work, family, aspirations and ambitions, and we have to work in order to fulfil those needs. However, the process of our involvement in the social activities of normal life has to become a part of natural and spontaneous karma yoga. I would suggest that the problems of social life are not mixed with the sannyasa lifestyle.

It is similar to having two areas of work, the office and home. You do not always bring office work back home and you never carry your house work to office because the purpose of both is different; one is to maintain yourself and the other is personal. In the same way, the social aspect of our life should be kept separate from the sannyasa aspect of our life. Be involved in the world, be fully active, work to attain fulfilment socially. That is perfectly all right. However, include the idea of karma yoga in your social life alongside the selfish tendencies and ego plays.

Sannyasa is an aspect of life where we work to develop our personality. When Paramahamsaji used to initiate people he would give them certain indications about their life. Those who were able to pick them up progressed and those who were not able to pick them up gradually isolated themselves from yoga and sannyasa. However, Paramahamsaji had the ability to inspire people psychically and spiritually and in that way he was able to lead us without our knowledge.

When this responsibility fell on me, I realized that I did not have that ability nor the vision which Paramahamsaji had, and I do not even want it today. So I found a way around it. I wrote down the qualities that one needs to develop in life and started to give that out as a code of conduct for the different stages of sannyasa. These booklets have become the guidelines for our growth through the sannyasa system of life because it is necessary that we perfect ourselves in certain attitudes and qualities before progressing to the next stage.

The practices of sannyasa life are different from the practices of yoga. Keeping the same concept and vision that Paramahamsaji had for sannyasa, it is necessary that we understand the rules of sannyasa. This involves developing certain qualities in life, observing our patterns of behaviour and action, coming to terms with our own internal behaviour, developing the power of observation in order to eventually have the power of discrimination and also evolving a state of vairagya so that we are not caught up in the maya of the world. Therefore, in the guidelines of sannyasa certain things have been given which we should try to practise and incorporate in our normal lifestyle.

As far as the practices of yoga are concerned, they are a tool of discovering the various aspects of our personality. This relates to an individual practising yoga and also to a sannyasin living in society. However, there is another aspect of yoga and our involvement with society, which is developed through the propagation of yogic techniques.

Paramahamsaji's mission is not limited to an association or organization, it also relates to individual effort. In fact, he has never supported organizations.

He has neither encouraged nor discouraged them. They have evolved due to the goodwill of individuals and many organizations have also dissolved after the dissolution of the goodwill of individuals. He was never one to build an empire. His mission was to approach people through people and not through an organized structure. However, in the normal world, to have a sense of identity and a structure of work, an organization is necessary. Yet, it is not the post or name which is important in an organization, but the involvement of a person. Paramahamsaji does not have any post, but he has the biggest post in our hearts.

So the organization, or the mission, of yoga which we are trying to develop must be run in a professional manner according to the principles of yoga, sannyasa and ashram. When I use the word professional, I do not mean commercial, I mean it in the sense of having the goodwill of everyone, all working together in harmony.

Let us see in which direction we are able to move in the future. I am confident that with the support of all of you, with your goodwill and love, we shall take many steps together in the spirit of yoga under the shelter of Paramahamsaji's guidance.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Yoga, the Gift of Peace for Humanity

Rimini, October 1994

Hari Om Tat Sat

I bring you greetings from the tradition of yoga and Sannyasa. Sannyasa is a way of life, and yoga is a method of experiencing the higher qualities of life. During this program we shall try to discover the different aspects of yoga as they relate to human life.

Yoga has been defined in many different ways, but there has been one statement by our guru, Swami Satyananda, in which he has defined yoga as the gift of peace for humanity. I feel this statement to be the most appropriate description of yoga, not because he is my guru but because I see the logic of the statement, because peace is something which we definitely desire and need in our life. We are all searching for peace. In our own ways, we are making different efforts to experience the state of peace and harmony in our life.

In this search for harmony, balance and peace we come across certain problems. We do not know the reason for disturbance in our life and therefore we do not discover how to attain peace. Peace and harmony are states of mind and there are many factors which can disturb the equilibrium of mind. Without dealing with the disturbed states of mind, we try to find



methods to attain peace externally. This is where yoga comes in with definite concepts about the human personality.

Yoga says that instead of isolating yourself from the mind, try to discover the reason of imbalance within yourself. The moment you are able to discover the reason for the imbalance within, you will find peace very easily. With this idea in mind, yoga has evolved the different practices of hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga and bhakti yoga.

Mind in the yogic tradition

Mind is recognized as the main factor governing our life. The ground of life, the basis of life, is the mind. The body extends externally from this ground of mind in the manifest dimension. The experience of the manifest nature, the knowledge, use and understanding of the manifest world is the superficial extension of the mind. The world of name, form and idea is the external manifestation of the mind. The world of senses and objects is the external experience and manifestation of the mind, whereas the world of spirit, psychic experiences and knowledge is the internal manifestation of the mind. Thus, in the yogic tradition the mind has been given a place of high importance and all the practices of yoga revolve around managing the mind.

One of the main textbooks of yoga known in the West is the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. To create a background for the theme of our seminar, I must explain to you some of the basic principles of yoga as given by Patanjali. When a musician comes on stage, he does not play the instruments immediately. He

goes through a process of tuning the instruments. That is what I am trying to do. You have to understand the basics of yoga before we go into the theme of yoga and meditation. You have to be very attentive and try to understand this properly because this is how you will eventually realize them yourself.

Those who have studied the *Yoga Sutras* will be familiar with its opening sutras. The second sutra states, “Control of mental patterns is yoga.” That is what people generally believe and quote with regard to their understanding of yoga. However, another statement has been made before this which is of utmost importance: *Atha yoga anushasanam* or “Yoga is a form of discipline.”

In this first statement, Maharshi Patanjali takes our attention to the aspect of discipline. This discipline is not only mental or internal, but also physical, external and social. He then says that as a result of this acquired discipline, it becomes possible to control the modifications of mind: *Yogah chitta vritti nirodhah*. The third statement is, *Tada drashtuh swaroope avasthanam* – “Then the seer is established in his own essential nature.”

The first three statements of the *Yoga Sutras* are of utmost importance in the yogic system. In fact, all the systems of asana and pranayama, hatha yoga, raja yoga and the other yogas revolve around these three statements. We can come to the conclusion that yoga is, first of all, a form of discipline which we must try to develop in our life. The second conclusion that we can derive is that we have to learn how to manage our mental expressions and experiences. So, keeping these two ideas in mind, we are going to begin with our discovery of yoga.

Yogic discipline

What does self-discipline mean? We can look at it from different angles: the physical, the psychological and the spiritual. Discipline, however, is not the correct word to describe Patanjali’s thought. The Sanskrit word which he has used is ‘anushasana’. *Anushasana* means to govern the different expressions of human personality. The governance of the body, mind and psyche is known as yogic discipline.

Discipline is definitely not a self-imposed daily routine. Governance of body and mind begin with making the effort to harmonize the various functions of body and mind. This discipline begins with the external body, which we can identify with every moment. We continuously and constantly identify with our body as the main tool of our expression in the manifest dimension. All the activities and interactions take place through the senses and the body.

However, we do not take proper care of our body. When we purchase a car, after driving a certain number of kilometers, we have to take it for servicing. The body is like the car. Since the time of your birth till today, how many times have you taken it for servicing? Maybe never. This is how we have created a great imbalance in our physical system. Due to this, we experience different illnesses and diseases.

Harmonizing the physical body

Illnesses and diseases represent malfunction of our physical structure, a lack of service to our physical structure. In order to provide this servicing, yoga comes with the practices of asana and pranayama. We begin with the practices of yoga by first trying to harmonize the physical activities of the body.



Apart from asana and pranayama, there is another system of yoga which is equally important to harmonize the body. These are the six purificatory practices of hatha yoga, known as shatkarma. Many people have a resistance to the practice of shatkarmas because we are not used to the difficult and hard practices of yoga which lead to self-purification. Nevertheless, they are, in my opinion, more important than the practices of asana and pranayama. These six practices are: *neti*, cleansing of the nasal passage; *dhauti*, cleansing of the upper digestive tract; *basti*, cleansing of the lower digestive tract; *nauli*, activation of the pranic centres in our physical structure; *kapalbhati*, purification of the brain by stimulating the brain; and *trataka*, focusing of the mind by isolating it from the world of senses.

In these six practices of hatha yoga there are three physical practices: *neti*, *dhauti* and *basti*. There is one pranic practice, *nauli*. One is a technique of concentration, *trataka*, and one is a technique of cerebral stimulation, *kapalbhati*. The six practices aim at harmonizing the subtle functions of the physical structure. Combined with the practices of asana and pranayama, they all become a very powerful system of inner harmony.

The aim of yoga is meditation, but yoga has not isolated the meditative process from the body. Yoga does not say that the meditative state belongs to the mind alone. Yoga says that the meditative state is a state of body as well as mind. Asana, pranayama and shatkarma lead to the physical meditative state. In this context, meditation means awakening and using the natural faculties of body, mind and spirit. After the practice of asana, pranayama and shatkarma, when we have been able to regulate the physical activities and harmonize the functions of our inner

body, the effect of physical harmony and balance influences the mental behaviour. Then we begin with the practices of concentration, which specifically deal with the mind.

Pure and impure mind

The mind has been viewed in two parts by yogis. The manifest mind is known as *ashuddha*, the impure mind. Why is it impure? Because of its distractions in the world of senses and objects. Due to these distractions, the mind does not have the ability to express its qualities naturally. Without this natural expression, it experiences stress and thoughts remain unclear. There is no clear direction for our actions and motivations. We are influenced by attractions and dislikes. We are aware of the surface currents which disturb our entire life-process. This state of mind is known as the impure, manifest state.

The *shuddha* or pure mind is the developed, harmonized, concentrated mind. This pure mind relates more to the spiritual dimension and its interaction with the external world. In order to have the experience of the inner mind and the ability to harmonize the external mind so that one becomes free from the different influences and stresses of life, yoga speaks of the techniques of *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. We shall look at these three different stages of the meditative yoga in brief.

Realization of mind

I have mentioned that the aim of yoga is meditation. What is meditation? Meditation is realization of mind; not mind as an independent unit, but rather as part of the physical structure and the spiritual dimension. This should be understood very carefully. Mind relates to the



spiritual dimension and also to the physical dimension. Most of the time, it is relating to the external world. When we try to become aware of the inner dimension, it takes a lot of effort and we encounter certain states which we are unable to understand rationally. However, it is not only a question of understanding the mental states in meditation; one has to make the effort to bring that higher realization into daily activity. That inner, spiritual realization then manifests in the form of refined qualities, refined behaviour and interaction with the world, and a deep understanding.

When we experience and express these qualities in our life, then that state is similar to the state of realization. This spiritual realization is the system of Vedanta where one does not only relate to a state of experience intellectually, but one actually lives it.

Remember, it is not necessary for every teacher to have actually experienced the spiritual realization. A professor who teaches atomic theory in the university does not necessarily have the experience of the atomic system. One has to experiment personally in order to have such a realization of the atomic principles. In the same way, with yoga or meditation also it is necessary that we make the effort to realize that inner experience. The systems of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana enable us to reach that level of understanding where we can realize and apply that experience in our normal life.

Pratyahara is a method by which we begin to gradually observe the activities of the mind in relation to the external world. We learn how to avoid stresses and tensions which affect the sensitivity of our personality and nature. After we have come to this point of managing the external interaction of the mind, we move into the practices of dharana. Dharana

means gaining the ability to focus our attention at one point without distractions. After we have attained perfection in this state of meditation, we move into dhyana. In dhyana we begin to change the nature and quality of the mind. Once the nature and quality of the mind changes, its manifestation in the external

life becomes different. Thereafter comes the state of samadhi. Samadhi means total inner harmony and union with the inner self, so that the external nature and internal nature of our life are in harmony with each other.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Satsang

Rimini, October 1994

Q. Why is it dangerous to awaken the kundalini without a master?

Swamiji: I think by now you should know why it is dangerous, because I have been giving you the complete picture of yoga. It is like jumping in the middle of a swimming pool without knowing how to swim. Please remember, and you have to understand this very carefully, that without proper training there cannot be any progress in yogic life or spiritual life.

I find it difficult to understand the logic of trying to awaken the kundalini without even knowing what is happening in the mind. Normally we are not able to handle our emotional upheavals nor are we able to manage the daily stresses. So how are we going to manage something that is happening in the deeper layers of consciousness, of which we have absolutely no concept? Kundalini is an experience of the deeper levels of consciousness. I hope this is clear.

Q. What is meant by managing and sublimating the instincts?

Swamiji: This is where the actual training of pratyahara and dharana comes in. You have to understand that what we experience physically has a starting point in the mind. To give you an example, a desire is generated in the mind, and then in order to fulfil that desire planning is done by *buddhi*, the intellect. It is then actualized by the *indriyas*, the senses. The result

which we obtain from the involvement of the senses is then again experienced by the mind in the form of contentment and satisfaction.

This happens with things we can relate to in normal life. Desires, aspirations and ambitions, which we consider as our needs, begin in the mind, manifest in the body and again fulfil the need of the mind. That which we consider as our need is regulated by the ego factor, the self-centred awareness, the sense of individuality.

Apart from these activities of the manifest nature, there are certain activities of the unmanifest nature which alter the whole expression of the human personality, mind, behaviour and attitude. Instincts belong to the unmanifest dimension, and I am using the phrase 'unmanifest dimension' for a specific reason. It means that it is something over which we have neither rational control nor rational understanding.

The instincts, according to yoga, are fourfold and we have discussed this. The first instinct is of procreation, the urge, the desire to become many. Physically, in the manifest dimension, this instinct manifests as the sexual urge. There are different levels of manifestation of instincts in the human personality. At a deeper level, the instincts represent the need for survival. In the physical plane they take various forms according to the interaction with the senses.

The urge for procreation is the need to have security for the lineage – to leave a footprint in the sands of time. Physically it manifests as the sexual urge due to its interaction with the senses. In fact, the entire manifest dimension is geared for procreation. It is something which happens naturally in every bird, every fish, every human being. The senses, relating

to sounds, colours and forms, are geared to fulfil this need for procreation.

Logically, rationally, there is no control over this natural urge. Externally you may say that you are a celibate or a brahmachari, according to the different spiritual traditions of the world. You may be able to control your sensory need, but what about the psychic need? Externally and socially you may remain unmarried, you may not even see a person of the opposite sex. Externally you may lead the so-called celibate life, but that does not mean that you have overcome the urge which is a deep psychic instinct. At one given time you will explode. You will say, "Enough of celibacy, back to enjoyment." It is true. This does happen, and it applies to the other instincts as well: fear, hunger or the craving for fulfilment, and sleep.

To manage these four instincts you have to go through a systematic process of perfecting the states of pratyahara and dharana. Pratyahara is a way of gradually withdrawing the senses from their link with the experience of objects and the pleasure derived from them. Therefore, the state of pratyahara represents the sensorial control of the instincts.

When we move into the state of dharana we begin to work with the twilight zone of the mind, the subconscious nature. In dharana the impressions of the instincts affecting the subconscious mind are channelled and brought under control. For this to happen, one has to go deep into the personality to the level of manomaya kosha and pranamaya kosha and balance the energies which give rise to an instinct.

Then, in dhyana, the actual dimension of instincts is transformed and sublimated. That happens by channelling the pranic force. When the pranic force

is channelled the consciousness is bound to go through a process of change and receptivity. So, it is the purification of consciousness and transformation of consciousness which leads to the sublimation of instincts, and it is made possible through the practices of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana.

Q. What is the difference between a spiritual guide and a spirit guide? I follow the teachings of Swami Satyananda, but for the last few months I have been following a spirit who gives me guidance with which I have had strong experiences. Can the two ways coexist?

Swamiji: This is a complicated subject. I will just give you my views on it, you don't have to accept them. For me, the spiritual guide is a person who can guide us through a process of sublimating the energy and consciousness. During this process we develop certain qualities which are universal in nature. These are cosmic qualities manifesting in an individual being. Thus, a spiritual guide teaches us to use the cosmic experience and apply it in everyday life.

A spirit guide can teach or inform us about methods of communicating with other subtle life forms. These subtle life forms may teach us some things, but not necessarily the means to sublimate the energy, expand the consciousness and develop universal human qualities. After all, spirits also have their level of evolution. If you die, you will become a spirit. If I die, I will become a spirit. If somebody contacts me after my death, I will be telling them to practise yoga. That will be my level of teaching and evolution. We all function according to our level of

evolution. In this process of evolution each individual spirit is bound by the karmas which guide it till the ultimate enlightenment is reached.

The spiritual guide can make us aware of the divine qualities governing karma, destiny, life and individuality. That is the difference between a spiritual guide and a spirit guide. If you are indeed with a spiritual guide as well as a spirit guide, it should not create confusion in your mind as long as you can maintain clarity regarding the aim of these different guides.

Q. In the book *Chakras*, Paramahamsaji says that the mind can lose itself if it is not concentrated and does not meditate on a psychic symbol. I concentrate on the personal mantra, but at the same time I am a Christian, I believe in Christ and I meditate on a Christian symbol. This is creating confusion and conflict for me.

Swamiji: The instructions say that when you use a mantra in meditation, you should also use a psychic symbol. It can be any symbol of any religion as long as you are able to focus your mind on it without any distractions.

Mantras by themselves do not mean anything. They are not prayers of the Hindu religion; they are sound vibrations which awaken dormant areas of our brain and personality. In the process of repeating the mantra, if you identify with a certain religious symbol that is perfectly all right. I would suggest that you keep your yoga practices and your religious practices and beliefs as two, but integrate them in order to evolve spiritually.

Q. If a chakra opens, can it close again? Can another person open our chakras?

Swamiji: In the process of chakra awakening there are three stages. In the first stage, the pranas are activated in the different chakras and this is known as *pranotthana*. When the pranas are being awakened in the chakras, it may feel as if the chakras are opening up. According to the system of kundalini yoga, first the prana in each chakra has to be awakened and purified. The stagnation in the pranic activity has to be removed. When this is achieved, then the state of consciousness related with the chakra will open up.

The awakening of consciousness related with the chakra is the actual chakra awakening. If in the initial process of chakra awakening the pranas are not activated fully, it is possible for the chakras to go back into a state of dormancy. From this viewpoint, yes, the energy aspect of the chakras can be awakened and they can again close. However, when the aspect of consciousness in each chakra awakens, then there is no possibility of going back to that state of dormancy. In this stage there is no regression, only a forward movement.

The third stage is kundalini awakening. It has been stated in the tradition that the kundalini can go back to its state of dormancy. In the book *Kundalini Tantra*, Paramahamsaji has described that once the kundalini passes manipura it will not fall back to mooladhara, but if it does not pass manipura there is a tendency for it to go back to the state of dormancy. This is the yogic view, and also the Buddhist view, in relation to kundalini. It should be clear that energy can stop its function, which will seem like closing of the chakra externally. Energy has a tendency to build up, to be

used, and then there is the need to build it up again. However, in the awakening of consciousness, states of mind are activated and once that happens, the experience of awakening continues.

With regard to another person awakening the chakras, it is possible, but it is not a common practice. There have been some cases in history where capable gurus have awakened the chakras of their capable disciples. One example is Ramakrishna Paramahansa touching the forehead of Vivekananda and giving him the vision of God. However, everyone is not capable like Vivekananda and everyone is not capable like Ramakrishna Paramahansa. So, when you get a capable guru with a capable disciple, then no doubt the guru can awaken the chakras of the disciple, but if you come to me to awaken your chakras, you are in for a shock!

Q. If every symbol lives in us like an unconscious reality and is a common archetype of all humanity, why is the snake in tantra and yoga a positive symbol of kundalini and of the spiritual ascent, while in the Catholic religion it is a filthy beast which has to be pushed away in order to ascend to spirituality?

Swamiji: Is it true that the snake is a negative symbol in Christianity? I have also studied Christianity and I do not share the same view as you. Let us start from the beginning. When God created the world, He put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. One thing I could never figure out was why God specifically pointed to one tree and told them not to eat the fruits of that tree. It is human nature that if you say, "Do not do that", they are going to do exactly that. So, God did want Adam and Eve to eat from that tree and he used human psychology.

After that, the snake comes into the picture. The snake is a very clever entity. It has always represented knowledge, whether in the Christian tradition or the yogic tradition. It is the emergence of the snake and the seduction by the snake which makes Eve bring the apple to Adam. Until there is knowledge, there cannot be any concept of right and wrong. So the snake, as the symbol of knowledge, was sent by the Almighty Lord Himself to bring the knowledge of right and wrong, just and unjust to Adam and Eve.

Whether we are going to fall or rise depends on the application of knowledge. It has been stated in the Upanishads that knowledge can lead to ignorance. There is ample evidence in the world to prove that knowledge, when used wrongly, is the cause of human downfall. If Adam and Eve, after eating the apple and gaining the knowledge, had applied their understanding to experience the simplicity of the self, God would not have thrown them out of Eden. But they used that knowledge to express their fears and inhibitions; therefore, the fall.

So who is at fault here, the snake or human nature? In my opinion, it is human nature, but because it was the snake who enticed Adam and Eve to eat the fruit, it has become a negative symbol. I think this is a fault of our understanding because from the dawn of human civilization, in nearly every tradition of the world the snake has represented power and wisdom. The yogic traditions and other Eastern mystical traditions have used the symbol of the snake to denote wisdom. Whereas traditions which have looked at the snake negatively have related it with power, forgetting that the symbology of the snake represents both power and wisdom.



The Five Koshas

Rimini, October 1994

Hari Om Tat Sat

Yoga says that the human personality has five aspects which are called *koshas* or dimensions. The first is annamaya kosha. This is the dimension in

which a human being performs and interacts in daily life. We perform and interact with the senses, with the external world, with name, form and idea. This external interaction is the dimension of annamaya kosha. The physical body is the medium or tool with which we are able to function optimally in the external dimension.

Annamaya kosha has also been translated as the dimension of matter, of which the body is a part, the

internal systems of the body are a part, the brain is a part. It is this annamaya kosha which has to be initially harmonized in the practice of yoga.

If we look at the body from the perspective of human anatomy and physiology, we find that there are many systems in it which perform assigned tasks in order to sustain our life. The respiratory system and the cardiovascular system perform their respective tasks, in the absence of which we would not survive.



In the same way, every different system of the body has a specific function which is necessary for life and survival. According to yogic physiology and anatomy, all these different systems form part of annamaya kosha. The experiences of the senses and the performance of activity by the brain is also part of annamaya kosha, and the sensory organs which relate to annamaya kosha are known as karmendriyas.

Achieving optimum physical harmony

Initially when we begin with our yoga practices, it is annamaya kosha which we try to harmonize. Remember, it is physical harmony which leads to a complete meditative state. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, the best physical state has been described in relation to the performance of asana. The definition of asana has been given as a state in which the body posture is comfortable, still and at total ease.

When the body is in a perfectly comfortable state, there is a sensation of pleasure emanating from the body and affecting the brain. According to the sutra, the body should be still, described as *sthiram*; a pleasurable experience must be attained by the posture of the body, described as *sukham*. This is how the physical state of asana has been described. Now if this is supposed to be the optimal state of the body, of annamaya kosha, then let us compare it with the normal state of our physical structure: pain in the joints, pain in the lower back, stiffness of the shoulders and neck, lack of circulation in various parts of the body. Of course, these states do not represent the balanced state of annamaya kosha, where there is comfort and where pleasure is experienced by the body. So how do we come to that state of optimum harmony in the physical body?

In our tradition of yoga, we begin with the practice of a very simple series of physical movements, called pawanmuktasana. If I have to teach anyone yoga, I make them practise pawanmuktasana for a minimum of one year, before moving on to other asanas.

From a practical understanding of the yogic system, the techniques of pawanmuktasana are of utmost importance. With this practice we actually meditate on each and every joint and part of the body, provided that the performance or the practice of asanas does not become a practice of movement where we lose awareness of the body and identify with the pleasures of the body.

Generally, during the practice of postures we tend to involve ourselves in the pleasures generated by the posture. We tend to identify with the movement that is being performed at the time of an asana practice. Movement is the superficial activity of asana. Creating a meditative state of the body is the real aim of asana. Therefore, I feel that pawanmuktasanas are the most important group of postures in yoga, because in this we identify with each and every joint, with each and every muscle and part of the physical structure. Along with that identification comes relaxation, awareness and the awakening of the faculty of that particular organ, part or muscle of the body.

A lot of research is being done with plants to see how they grow if they are given proper care and enough attention. Why can't we apply the same principle to our big toe? Why can't we give proper care and attention to our big toe so that the pranic flow in the big toe becomes active? When that happens, the entire cellular structure of the big toe will undergo a transformation. You can try it with your right toe

and compare it with the left toe after three months. Maybe you will see that the right toe is bigger and fatter than the left one!

Awareness, relaxation and activation of energy in the body is what we try to attain with the practice of postures. When the mind merges with the body and they fuse as one entity, that is known as enlightenment of the body. This is the progression in the system of yoga. It is not necessary that you attempt this from today or tomorrow. I am trying to make it clear that one cannot isolate the body from the mind or the mind from the body in the practices of yoga. There should be awareness not only of the external parts or organs, but you have to also develop awareness of the internal systems which are in stress and tension because of misuse and overuse. This internal activity also has to be regulated.

In one stage of the practice of yoga nidra, we are asked to rotate the mind from one part of the body to the next. That is just an example of how we have to train our mind to interact with the body. So, when we try to balance our annamaya kosha, we are actually educating and training the mind to realize the potential of the physical body.

Manomaya kosha

After annamaya kosha comes manomaya kosha. Of course traditionally pranamaya kosha comes in between, but we shall discuss that later.

Manomaya kosha is the dimension of mental experience and interaction with the self and the external environment. It is a very important and mysterious aspect of human personality. How do we know what the mind is? How does the mind interact?

What is the behaviour of our mind and what are the attributes of the *gunas*, the natural qualities with which we have come into this life?

Yoga says that the manifest mind has four specific aspects: *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. That is how the mind interacts. *Manas* is the aspect of mind which is involved in contemplation of the experiences of sensory perceptions. If some music is playing, we may like it or dislike it; if there are sounds, we may accept them or not accept them; if there are sensory perceptions such as heat and cold, we may enjoy them or not enjoy them. This involvement of the mind with the sensory perceptions, with the sense organs and the external environment is the attribute of *manas*.

The second aspect is *buddhi*, the intellect. *Buddhi* is the rational understanding of human nature. We try to see the concept of right and wrong, just and unjust through our *buddhi*. Rationality, understanding, acceptance and rejection are the four attributes of *buddhi*.

The third aspect of the manifest mind is *chitta*. It is the aspect which receives impressions of the present experience and stores them for future use in the form of memory, in the form of subconscious understanding and knowledge. The fourth aspect is *ahamkara*, the ego factor, the identity of the self with the environment in which we live.

Manomaya kosha also includes feelings and emotions, and all these faculties and activities of *manomaya kosha* have to be channelled. Normally there are too many distractions which do not allow us to focus on one experience for long. It is not our fault. It is the nature of the mind to jump from one thing to the next, without allowing one the time to assimilate an experience. When the mind and attention are



jumping from one thing to the next, subconscious and unconscious psychological stress is being created. One can deal with the external stress, but to deal with subconscious and unconscious stress is very difficult.

Yoga tries to deal with this aspect of the human personality by first creating a state of relaxation within the mind. However, before this relaxation can take place there has to be an awareness of what is happening around us. If we have to close the doors and windows of a room, we need to use our legs and hands to make the physical effort to do so. In the same way, in relation to the mind we have to go through a process of first becoming aware of what is happening around us. We have to identify what is necessary and what is unnecessary, isolate the negative reactions from the normal experiences so that the distractions in the mind lessen. Then we learn to focus the mind in one experience, in one state. This process is known as *pratyahara*.

Developing external and internal awareness

Pratyahara is the beginning of the training to deal with the human mind. In the practices of *pratyahara*, we are first taught to extend our awareness outside, just as in the practices of *pawanmuktasana* we are taught to extend the awareness to the different parts of the body and to know that they exist.

You can try an experiment. Find someone who does not practise yoga and ask him one question. How many times during a day does he become aware of his feet or toes? If there is pain or suffering, then of course he will be aware that he is experiencing pain in his toes or feet, but normally you will find very few people who will say, "Oh, I know that they exist."

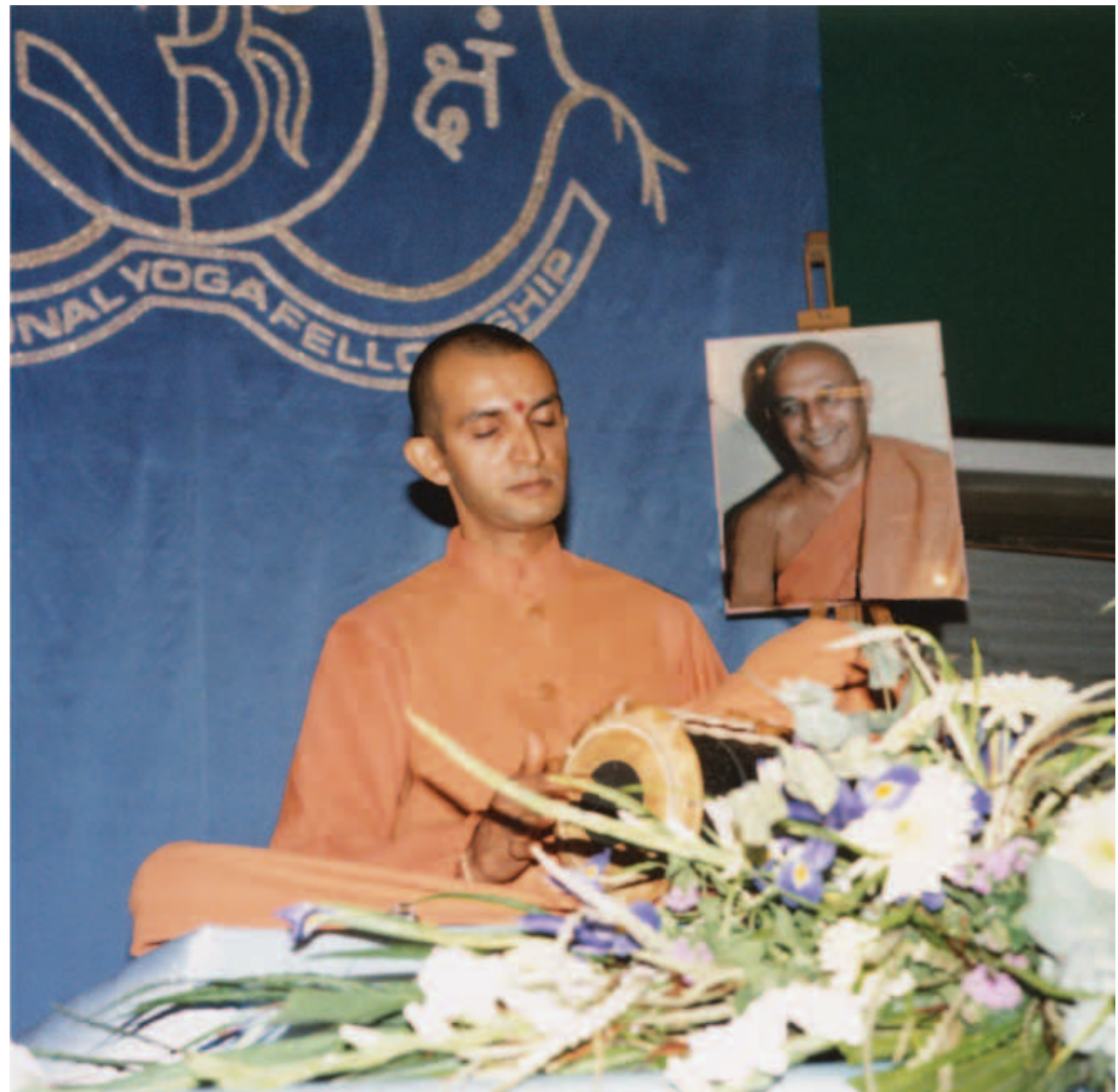
Just as in pawanmuktasana we become aware of the extensions of the body, in pratyahara we become aware of the extensions of the mind in the outer world. After we have been able to fully extend our awareness and senses externally, then the process of gradually withdrawing them and focusing them inside begins. So yoga has been very clear in stating that meditation is not just closing off the external influences which affect the mind. Meditation is also not just a process in which we become aware of the mind. Meditation is the state where we add the quality of awareness to every mental process and activity.

Re-educating the mind

With the practices of pratyahara and dharana, we re-educate the mind to become aware of itself. This is a very important education which we have never received in our life. Our system of education is job-oriented whereas the yogic system of education is oriented towards self-awareness.

Self-awareness is not a selfish attitude towards oneself; rather, it is becoming aware of the qualities that we have and using them in life. This is the training, the education which yoga provides us with. First there is extension of the senses and awareness into the environment, into activities, thoughts and behaviour; then there is awareness of one's own performance and reactions in life, which eventually leads to learning how to harmonize them.

Many times I come across people who have meditated for many years and trained intensely, but they cannot control or manage their own reactions and negativity. What they try to achieve in meditation is something I have never been able to figure out.



It defeats the entire purpose of self-awareness. It defeats the entire purpose of practising the systems of yoga by which we can realize our nature and qualities.

I want to make it very clear that there has to be a system in the practice of meditation. Not only in meditation, but the system has to apply in life too. The term 'system' should not be taken in a negative context, but in a creative, positive and supportive context. Once we have been able to manage the normal activities of the mind, the thoughts, feelings and emotions, once we have been able to harmonize and understand our rationality, then we begin to deal with pranamaya kosha.

Pranamaya kosha

Pranamaya kosha is the dimension of energy, the dimension filled with prana. What is prana? It has been translated as energy. Prana has also been defined as the force which governs the manifest dimension or the life process.

Yoga says that prana has two aspects. In one aspect prana governs the activities and functions of the body and mind. In another aspect prana manages the cosmos, the universe. We have to understand prana from a different perspective in order to relate it to our life. Prana is the quality of elements. What is the quality of fire? Heat. What is the quality of water? Fluidity. What is the quality of earth? Its supportive nature. What is the quality of air? Its sustaining nature. What is the quality of sky? To provide the right atmosphere for growth. There is a beautiful statement in the Vedas, *Kham Brahman* – "Space is the higher consciousness". It is this space which has

been recognized as the ultimate mahaprana or cosmic prana.

Each element has a particular quality, a particular attribute and function. The combination of these different elements gives birth to a particular life form. In the body we experience heat; that is the quality of the *agni tattwa*, the fire element. Our body is more than eighty percent liquid; that is the quality of the *apas tattwa*, the water element. The different compositions and fusion of elements in different degrees give rise to new life forms. These elements, along with their qualities, support the life forms, and their inherent quality is known as prana.

Prana is known by the yogis to exist in animate beings and also in inanimate objects. Prana can have different colours. Just as you mix two colours to create a third one, two elements can create a third force of prana. So you can imagine how many different types of prana we have, with the combination of the five elements and also their individual pranic energy. The manifestation of this pranic force is seen in kundalini yoga in the chakras. Prana is the factor which can elevate the mind and consciousness and raise the energy. Prana can also bind one to a physical state of experience from which there is no escape, seen in the form of different mentalities.

Harmonizing the pranic flows

According to yoga, the pranic system is harmonized with the practices of pranayama and dharana. When we practise pranayama, we are purifying, stimulating and awakening the physical pranic energy. When we come to the state of dharana after pratyahara, then we deal with the energy contained in the tattwas.

Management of the pranic kosha through dharana has not yet been described in the western countries. However, an attempt has been made to describe these practices in the book *Dharana Darshan*.

We must understand that prana is gross and subtle at the same time. In the practices of hatha yoga, an attempt is made to harmonize the gross and the subtle prana in the form of pingala and ida. The first aspect of prana in hatha yoga is the solar aspect, the dynamic force, known as *pingala*. The second aspect of prana is the lunar aspect, the passive force, known as *ida*. The two also represent the channels of the flow of vital energy in the body.

In order to activate the flows of ida and pingala in the body, the practices of pranayama as well as mantra are used. Let us briefly look at the techniques which awaken these solar and lunar forces in our body.

The solar force represents the vital, dynamic aspect of prana and the lunar force represents the passive aspect. The dynamic force controls and regulates the functions of the physical body. The passive force controls the functions of mind. In the practices of pranayama, we initially try to regulate the flow of breath. Through the breath we eventually alter the flow of the pranic energy in our system.

There are many different pranayamas and they can be divided into three main groups: vitalizing pranayamas, tranquillizing pranayamas and harmonizing pranayamas. Vitalizing pranayamas generate intense heat in the pranic activity of the body. Research has shown that people who are feeling physically dull can be activated by vitalizing pranayamas because practices which vitalize the pranic system are beneficial for externalizing the mental activity.

I had the opportunity to teach vitalizing pranayamas to catatonic patients in a mental hospital. Catatonia is a depressive nervous state in which there is absolutely no control over the functions of the nervous system, no control over the muscular system; there is no interaction between the brain and other parts of the body. The commands are not recognized by the body, and the body does not send any stimulation to the brain. If you put a catatonic person in one position, they will continue to remain in it. If their arm is up, it will remain up until you forcibly bring it down. In order to make them practise pranayama I had to actually plug their nostrils with cotton wool.

One of the first practices that we did was activation of pingala nadi by breathing in and out only through the right nostril, by blocking the left nostril with cotton wool. We found that after a few days of the practice, they began to respond to instructions and became more active. Once they began to respond, we incorporated other pranayamas into the sessions. The end result was that they were able to look after their own needs, relate to the instructions that were being given to them and also recognize the situations and the environment of the external world. What this indicated was that the practices which vitalize the pranic system in the body are beneficial in externalizing the mental activity.

Similarly, when people who are hyperactive or prone to chronic stress and tension practise tranquillizing pranayamas, it helps them to quieten and relax their nervous agitation. And in order to be efficient in life, it is necessary to harmonize the activities and interaction between brain and body by practising harmonizing pranayamas. According to



yoga, these different influences on the body and brain come about with the activation of the solar and lunar aspects of prana. Of course, a level of perfection has to be reached in order to experience their real effects, but it can be said that pranayamas help activate the physical as well as the mental levels of vitality.

Prana and mantra

In hatha yoga, mantras are also used to stimulate the pranas. The system is similar to that of kundalini yoga. The yogis came to realize that each flow of energy or channel of prana is governed by a specific vibratory force. Pingala, the solar force, is governed by the mantra *Ham* and ida, the lunar force, is governed by the mantra *Tham*. The word 'hatha' is the combination of these two mantras, so from the name itself it can be seen clearly that the purpose of hatha yoga is to balance the pranas manifesting in body and mind.

When we go deeper into the regulation of the pranic force in our body, we have to deal with the practices of kundalini yoga. Kundalini yoga states that there are six main psychic centres within the body. Five centres, from mooladhara to vishuddhi, relate to the individual senses and elements: mooladhara relates to the earth element, swadhisthana to the water element, manipura to the fire element, anahata to the air element and vishuddhi to the space element. These five chakras also relate to the different sense organs and sensory perceptions: touch, smell, sight, hearing and taste. The sixth chakra is ajna chakra, the individual mind, the cognitive force of the manifest dimension.

People also include sahasrara in the system of chakras, but sahasrara is not a chakra which undergoes

transformation or awakening. It is the perennial state of an awakened being, where one controls all the faculties of the individual mind and also experiences the state of paranormal consciousness. I am using the word paranormal here because the state of sahasrara cannot be defined by words. It is the state of inner effulgence or enlightenment.

So, the six chakras are the most important ones and they are activated by *beeja* or seed mantras. There is a group of practices in kundalini yoga known as *chakra shuddhi*. These practices purify the psychic centres and the pranic energy contained within them. In yoga we use the beeja mantra of each chakra to activate the pranas.

Awakening the dormant potential

In pranamaya kosha there is another aspect: that of consciousness. Each aspect of prana has been linked with a definite state of consciousness and one instinct. In order to awaken one's dormant potentials in the form of kundalini, yoga states that it is necessary to control the four basic instincts.

Mooladhara chakra, which is the first psychic centre, controls the aspect of *maithuna*, the sexual instinct. Sublimation of this instinct leads to transformation of the mooladhara energy. Swadhisthana contains the instinct of fear, known as *bhaya*, and here sublimation of the fear instinct leads to awakening the energy of swadhisthana and moving up to manipura. Manipura governs the instinct of craving for satisfaction and fulfilment, which is known as *ahara*. This is necessary to sustain the individual personality. Just as food sustains the physical body, feelings sustain the mental body. From good food we derive enjoyment



and pleasure; from good feelings also we derive enjoyment, pleasure and nurturing.

The fourth instinct of sleep or *nidra* is governed by anahata chakra. Here, sleep is not to be understood in the same context as normal sleep. Sleep, or

nidra, here means the absence of a solid base which leads to disconnection of the senses from the outer environment. Through the eyes, we are aware of the quality of vision. When we close the eyes, the external vision is not active; there is disconnection of the visual

sense from the world of senses and objects. We hear through the ears. If we plug our ears and do not hear any outside sound, then that is known as disconnection from the world of sound. These different disconnections lead to isolation of the mind from the world of senses and objects. This is known as nidra. Nidra has also been defined as an instinct because when the mind is overloaded with sensory inputs, there is a natural and instinctive tendency for it to withdraw itself from the outside world. This withdrawal is experienced in the form of a deep introversion which physically manifests as sleep.

We try to overcome these four instincts in the process of the awakening of pranamaya kosha. The instinct of vishuddhi is of ego-centred awareness. Ego or the 'I' relates its identity with the external world. The identification with the world of name, form and idea is known as ego identification.

In the practices of kundalini yoga, we have to work at different levels simultaneously. Awakening of the pranas in the different chakras is one aspect, managing and sublimating the instincts is another aspect and experiencing the altered state of consciousness associated with each chakra is the third aspect. With the opening of the different chakras, the balanced energy, the universal energy known as kundalini shakti begins to flow in our body. The kundalini is an aspect of mahaprana, cosmic energy, manifesting in an individual body. It is an unlimited force in a limited, physical, individual structure.

Vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas

With the awakening of pranamaya kosha, we move on to vijnanamaya kosha which is the intuitive aspect or

dimension of the mind. Vijnanamaya also means the subtle understanding. It means wisdom and not just knowledge. Knowledge can be an intellectual, rational process, but wisdom is the living application of that knowledge in which we become aware of the different dimensions of consciousness.

The practices of jnana yoga and meditation are applied to experience vijnanamaya kosha. This eventually leads to the experience of anandamaya kosha, the blissful body. Anandamaya is not only bliss, it is also beauty. Bliss and beauty are the two qualities which a spiritual aspirant eventually experiences.

So, this is how yogis have viewed the entire structure of the human personality. The yogic vision of the human personality is not limited to the day to day experiences of the body, mind and emotions. It integrates the manifest experiences with the unmanifest experiences, fully recognizing that the aspect of life with which we identify is only external and superficial.

A gradual expansion of awareness

In the process of meditation, when we begin to move from pratyahara to dharana, there has to be a gradual, systematic expansion of awareness. An experiment was conducted in the United States about seven years ago, in which a hypnotist hypnotized a person and asked him to describe the number of leaves on a plant in the room.

Now, consciously we may walk into a room and look around, but we would not recognize the quality of the room or the objects in there. However, the subconscious mind observes everything. Under hypnosis, the man actually gave the exact number of leaves that were on the potted plant in the room. He

had not counted the leaves beforehand. He was in the room for the first time in his life.

What does this experiment indicate? The mind has the ability to observe. It observes all the time, every moment, but that process of observation is not conscious, it is subconscious.

If we can make this process of observation or awareness a conscious activity, imagine the change, the transformation that will take place in life. Externally, this ability will seem to be a psychic power to someone who has not developed it. It is not a psychic power; it is the natural ability of the subconscious and the unconscious. It is the total consciousness manifesting externally.

There is no such thing as *siddhi* or psychic power in this world, just natural qualities of the human consciousness which manifest after we have educated and trained ourselves. For an ignorant person such abilities may seem paranormal, but for the person who is experiencing them, it is a natural, spontaneous process. This is how we move into the meditative states through our personality. In meditation it is not only the mind which is involved, but also each and every aspect of human nature, mind and personality. This has been the aim of yoga – to awaken the entire human nature so that one can experience total fulfilment.

With this we come to the conclusion of this short stay. It has been a matter of joy for me to be with all of you. I have come to Europe after a gap of fourteen years and I am happy that I came to Italy first, because here I have found your affection, support and care, and it is something which I will always remember. So, thank you to all of you and thank you Italy.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Satsang

Rimini, October 1994

Q. Swamiji, many saints had the experience of ecstasy without any particular practice. Can you explain this please?

Swamiji: This has been explained in many ways during our discussions. Every human being has their level of evolution and each human being is affected by the law of karma. It is the theory of karma which plays a very important role in the process of evolution of human consciousness. According to yogic thought, the karma which we are experiencing today is actually the fruit of karmas planted many years ago. The seeds of karmas which we plant today will be reaped in the future.

When a seed is planted in the ground, it does not immediately grow into a flowering tree. In the same way, the result of whatever we accumulate in the form of karmas will be seen in the future. So, when at a particular point of evolution there is physical death, the karmas carry on to the next life.

It is not necessary that we begin with primary class every time we take birth. The saints or yogis who have had spiritual inclination from the very beginning are reaping the result of their karmas from previous lifetimes. This has also been explained in yoga as a state of mind which is receptive to the process of evolution. So, naturally, it becomes possible for many people to experience ecstasy or have similar spiritual experiences without any external effort because they have already attained that level of knowledge, awareness and realization. Therefore, as practitioners

of yoga we try to improve our present lifestyle so that the impressions of this lifestyle are experienced later on.

Human beings have a strange mentality, and it has been my observation that to act according to that mentality creates disharmony. We tend to live in the past, worry about the future, and we miss the present existence totally and completely. The training which we receive in yoga makes us aware of today. You may have come across the statement in yoga, "Be in the present." Derive understanding from the experiences of the past, better yourself, better your performance, better your expressions and actions in the present, and this betterment will give you the ability to deal with what comes tomorrow.

In this approach there is application of the yogic principles according to our needs and environment. We can even say that the entire yogic training is geared to provide this state of perception. What we have been discussing these past few days has been a very simple understanding of the yogic principles. In this process of yoga, it is not important to practise many new things all the time; it is the application of the understanding, the knowledge and the practice which is important in yoga. Knowing much has no meaning in yoga. Applying whatever little you know has a greater significance. It is in this spirit that you have to understand yourself and not worry about what you wish to achieve or aspire for in the future. I am speaking from a personal perspective, not from the social perspective.

In human nature there are four aspects which are important: strength, weakness, ambition and need. These four aspects have to be managed properly in

order to realize our nature. We have certain qualities which are our strengths, but we do not have the right understanding of these qualities. Therefore our awareness of them becomes a factor of the ego. The understanding becomes an egoistic understanding, "I am superior" or "I have this skill". On the other hand, when we become aware of our weaknesses, there is depression. We feel insecure, we experience an inferiority complex, and we are unable to cope with the events and experiences of life.

The practices of yoga, whether they are asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, kriya or kundalini yoga, aim at teaching us one thing: to channel our strengths and weaknesses in the right direction so that they do not create any kind of mental and emotional imbalance or difficulty and awaken the faculties of the self so that they are used creatively in life. The moment you are able to use your strengths creatively, you will reach different, higher states of consciousness. In those states of consciousness you may experience ecstasy, but as a practitioner you should not aim for ecstasy or something beyond the practicalities of life. First give yourself the chance to understand the actualities of life.

Q. Swamiji, how can I keep under control the strong urge to fall in love and not get carried away by the waves of love, and how can I combine all this in yogic practice?

Swamiji: Sorry, I have no personal experience. Unfortunately, I have not fallen in love with anyone and fortunately, nobody has fallen in love with me. So, whatever I say will lack experience.

The love which we experience in life is conditional love, which carries with it a lot of attachment and even possessiveness. This love is used to satisfy the personal needs of the body and emotions. Yoga does not talk of the conditional love; it speaks of the unconditional love. In yoga, love is an aspect of bhakti yoga.

Bhakti yoga is generally translated as the yoga of devotion, but the actual process of bhakti yoga is changing the conditioning of love, affection and possessiveness to an unconditional, universal state. The force of love is then directed to the experience of unity within. When the force of love is directed to experience this unity of the self, it is not only an experience of unity with God, but with every individual being on the planet. This feeling of oneness, feeling the same emotion and affection for everyone is known as transcendental love. In the process of yoga one comes to this point of transcendental affection and love, which sustains and merges positively with every being involved in it. That is the yogic view.

Q. Swamiji, I have read about bhakti yoga and I would like to know what to do beyond practices, when one feels this drive in the heart towards the divine and the guru?

Swamiji: Imagine that you have to sit on a hot plate where they make pizza for one minute. That one minute will feel like one hour or even eternity because in that state of experience there is neither unity nor balance with whatever is happening in the body and mind. There is no merger of ideas, mind, concepts or interaction. However, if you find a friend and begin to chat, no matter how unnecessary the topic may be,



one hour will feel like a very short time, because at that moment there is an identification of concepts, ideas, interaction, speech and behaviour with the other person.

It is this link which is important in bhakti yoga. If the link does not exist, then you would be totally disinterested in what is happening. It could happen even here. Some of you may think, "What nonsense is he talking!" and may want to get up, leave the room and get a cup of coffee. Some people may react the other way and think, "Interesting subject, worth listening to, so let us sit down. We can have the coffee after an hour." This is the link which can be created, and is created, between one individual and another. It is the link which can be created between an individual and a concept, idea or belief. This link, or creation of this link, is an aspect of bhakti yoga.

Paramahamsaji has said that eventually it is bhakti yoga which becomes important in our discovery of the self. In normal life, we perform actions and each action gives birth to an understanding. When we have that understanding in the form of knowledge and wisdom, then there is generation of inner trust, faith and conviction. Understanding that arises out of action generates conviction, faith and trust. So, there are three stages of human interaction: action, understanding or knowledge, and conviction or trust. In yogic terminology, it is karma yoga converting into jnana yoga and jnana yoga transforming into bhakti yoga. Karma is the aspect of action, jnana is the aspect of understanding and knowledge, and bhakti is part of the self-trusting nature.

When the word 'yoga' is added to karma, jnana and bhakti, their concept and quality changes. Karma which

is performed naturally and spontaneously, combined with yoga, becomes action filled with harmony. Understanding and knowledge when combined with yoga become the process of harmonious understanding which does not create inner mental conflict. Conviction and trust when combined with yoga become a process of inner purification and deeper trust in oneself. So, harmony in action is karma yoga, harmony in knowledge is jnana yoga and harmony in inner experiences is bhakti yoga.

We need to integrate these three aspects of our life. Generally our actions are not in conformity with our understanding, concepts and thoughts. Therefore, we find many imbalances in our life patterns. When, through the practice of yoga, we are able to experience this inner harmony, then the ability to trust oneself is a spontaneous development. This ability to trust creates a link between the individual and the external, social and cosmic environment, which leads to clarity of knowledge and psychic experience. This clarity of knowledge and understanding and psychic experience lead to unity of the individual mind with the cosmic mind. Therefore, bhakti yoga is said to be the final yoga which evolves spontaneously in the life of a practitioner.

You may practise hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, mantra yoga and other forms of yoga, but they represent a process of working with yourself. When you have worked upon yourself and come to terms with yourself, then bhakti yoga begins. Transformation of human qualities is bhakti yoga. Using the inherent qualities for the betterment of our life and that of others is bhakti yoga.

Why has bhakti yoga been defined as the yoga of devotion? It is due to total belief in the potential of an

individual being. Modern research into human genetics shows that there is a link between an offspring and all its ancestors. I am sure that if they continue with this research they will go far back into the past and eventually discover the gene which links us with God. That Godly gene is definitely inside the body. We just have to find a way to know it. We have the potential to use that power and wisdom creatively. And when one begins to use that power and wisdom creatively, that is the state of devotion.

This is the yogic definition of devotion, not the normal definition. The normal definition is in the form of adoration, in the form of asking, in the form of feeling that there is a higher entity governing our life, and surrendering to that higher entity. The yogic definition of devotion is fusion – fusing with the higher self by overcoming the ego and the manifest nature.

In order to attain this fusion, one has to overcome the ego, the mind, the attractions and repulsions. Attraction and repulsion, pain and pleasure, these are states of mind which pull or divert our attention to the external world of the senses. In the state of perfect harmony, the energy of God begins to flow in an individual being, and that is the state of bhakti yoga.

Eventually, as a process of your own personal growth and evolution, you will come to the state of bhakti in the course of time. Bhakti is the natural expression of the harmony of the spirit. This is what we all aspire for in the process of our evolution. Moving from the ridiculous to the sublime, that is bhakti yoga.



The Role of Yoga Teachers

Rimini, October 1994

Hari Om Tat Sat

Today is considered to be a very auspicious day because traditionally, beginning from today, for nine days people in India practise sadhana to receive the grace of the Divine Mother. Today is the day when the worship of Mother Durga begins. Of course when the events here were being planned it was not in the minds of the organizers to have such a program today, but someone else guided the events and today we are all meeting here. Later on, there will be a fire ceremony as well and I feel that whatever you are going to receive today will be with the blessings of the Divine Mother.

To begin with, you will receive certificates stating that you have the ability to teach yoga. That will be the beginning of your contribution to the growth of human society. It is definitely a very big responsibility which you must be very careful with. Now it becomes your commitment to teach and guide others according to your understanding and knowledge.

As teachers you will eventually have to evolve certain qualities within yourself. Just teaching the practices of yoga is not enough. Propagating yoga involves supporting the needs of the individuals who you are teaching, without getting caught up in their head trips and maintaining your own clarity of mind and aim.

Along with teaching you have to add the component of affection for students, as well as the ability to understand their needs and dedicating yourself to help them as much as possible. Involvement with human society is a lifelong commitment. This is one point I would like to emphasize again and again so that you can understand it.

Give your best without killing yourself. If you can do that, then eventually you will evolve into a good teacher and helper of human society. Live the spirit of yoga in real life, not only intellectually. This is the only message which I have to give to you today. You have received your certificate of affiliation, and this affiliation is with the mission of Paramahamsaji, which has been to promote yoga with the aim of providing people with a different understanding of human life. Maintaining a broad vision of life is the aim of Paramahamsaji's mission.

A small frog used to live in a well. It had been born in the well and that was his world. One day, another frog fell into the well who had come from the ocean. The ocean frog was going on a world tour. When the two met, they started to talk about their respective homes. The well frog asked, "Where are you from?" The ocean frog said, "I have come from the ocean." The well frog asked, "How big is the ocean?" The ocean frog said, "It's immense, it's huge!" The well frog jumped from one corner of the well to the other corner and said, "Is your ocean this big?" The ocean frog said, "No, it is a hundred times bigger than this." The well frog said, "Anything bigger than my well does not exist in the world. You are a liar."

We are like the well frog. We live in a house of concepts, ideas and beliefs which we create for

ourselves and anything that does not fit in with them tends to be anti-others. If it does not fit in with our mentality, we cannot accept it. As yoga teachers and people associated with the mission of Paramahamsaji, it is our duty to have a broad vision about everything. There are certain qualities which we need to evolve in order to have such a vision.

The first is the quality of acceptance – acceptance of the patterns of thoughts, beliefs and lifestyles of other people. The second is the quality of understanding – understanding the viewpoints of people with whom we interact. The third is the ability to adjust. Just as we adjust with the weather, in the same way there has to be adjustment with other people. If it is hot, we remove our clothes; if it is cold we put on clothes and try to maintain our level of comfort. In the same way, there has to be adaptation in our interaction with other people. If somebody is blowing hot, remove your clothes so that you do not feel the heat and are comfortable. If somebody is blowing cold, put on a few layers. Generally we do not do this and there is a reaction. The fourth quality is maintaining your own thoughts clearly. When you are able to maintain your own clarity of thought, you are not influenced by the reactions and negativities of the world.

If you can develop some of these qualities, you will be a successful human being. That has been the mission of Paramahamsaji, to make one a successful human being in life. In order to do this he has used the medium of yoga. So, I wish you good luck in your attempt to become a successful human being.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Satsang

Firenze, October 1994

Q. Please tell us something about Paramahamsaji's life and mission.

Swamiji: Paramahamsaji began having spiritual experiences at an early age. On those occasions people around him would think that he had become unconscious. He would naturally go into states in which he seemed to be unconscious, and he would stay like that for two or three days. If these states had been seen in someone of an advanced age it would have been recognized as samadhi. Of course, as he was a child he could not express or analyze this state. His parents could not understand it either because they had no spiritual background. And it is natural for parents to become anxious if their child goes into an unconscious state or coma for no explicable reason.

They tried many different treatments, but nothing worked. In the course of time they took him to various sannyasins who used to pass that way. They prophesied that one day he would be a sannyasin and not an ordinary one, but of the highest calibre. So the samskaras of sannyasa and renunciation were with him from his early years. His whole life was moving towards that aim.

When he was about seventeen or eighteen, he came in contact with a tantric yogini from Nepal. She taught Paramahamsaji about kundalini, chakras and other tantric systems. She said, "I can teach you only this much because you have very strong samskaras for

spiritual life and sannyasa, but in order to become stable it is necessary for you to find a guru."

At the age of nineteen, Paramahamsaji left his home. His father actually came to the bus station to see him off. He said, "You are going away now. You are going on a different journey and we do not exist for you on that journey. You should definitely never look back in your life. You are going with our best wishes, but the only instruction I can give you at this time is, do not look back."

'Not looking back' has always been Paramahamsaji's philosophy. Even nowadays he says, "When I left my home I did not look back. I joined my guru's ashram and lived in Rishikesh for many years. When I left my guru's ashram, I did not look back. I did not go back to Rishikesh while I was working for my mission. Now I have left the Bihar School of Yoga and the mission, and I am not going back. There is no question of my returning to the places I came in contact with before. Even when I leave this body, if God asks me whether I want to go back, I will say no."

He developed his own understanding of sannyasa which was natural and spontaneous. He never studied in the ashram, only worked, but he picked up everything. For example, he would hear a lecture by Swami Sivananda, sit down at the typewriter and type the whole lecture verbatim. He had a photographic memory. In this way he would prepare and type manuscripts and books of Swami Sivananda's lectures. In those days there were no tape recorders, not in the mountains anyway. Paramahamsaji had a very sharp and receptive intellect and was able to pick things up by just being in the environment.

When he was leaving the ashram after Swami Sivananda had given him the mission of yoga, Swami Sivananda initiated him into the higher practices of kriya and kundalini yoga in just a few minutes. What he has taught us, he picked up from his guru in five or ten minutes. It was transmission from a capable guru to a capable disciple.

Paramahamsaji never felt that he was a guru or a master. He had a very deep love for his guru and always considered himself a disciple. Even after Swami Sivananda's departure from the physical body, Paramahamsaji was in contact with him psychically. He was always being guided by his guru and he was the only person in the galaxy of Swami Sivananda's disciples who was initiated into the Paramahansa order.

Swami Sivananda told him, "I am initiating you now into the paramahansa order, but you will have to work hard to come to the level of a paramahansa in your later life. First you will have to exhaust your karmas, your ambitions and your desires. When you know that you have exhausted everything, you have fulfilled everything, then you will eventually leave human society and establish yourself in the paramahansa state." So Paramahamsaji asked, "If I have to wait that long, then why don't I lead a normal life and exhaust my karmas that way?" Swami Sivananda said, "No. In the life of a grihastha in society one accumulates karmas and attachments, and the motivation is self-oriented. As a sannyasin one learns not to be self-oriented, but there is a definite aim in which you dedicate yourself to God, guru and mission. Therefore, you should always remain a true sannyasin and work to fulfil all your karmas and samskaras."

That is what he did through the propagation of yoga. And after coming to fulfilment in his life, after having experienced everything, he left. When he left, he went without informing anyone. He just walked out of the gates. The only people who knew about his departure were me and a couple of others. Nobody in the ashram knew that he was planning to leave. And even for those who knew he was going, it was a very hard moment.

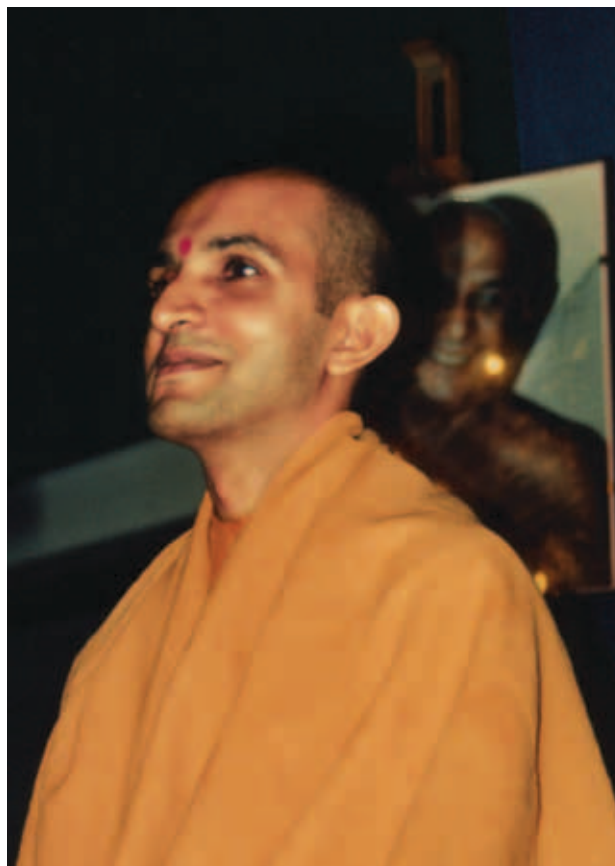
At one point there came a time in his life where he was absolutely not interested in anything. As if he had totally withdrawn himself and was trying to figure out what to do next. He travelled around India visiting different holy places and people, totally incognito. Then he received some inner inspiration which made him go to Deoghar and establish himself there.

Of course I am making a long story short. Even in Deoghar he did not want any kind of facility for himself. People felt a lot of concern for him because he had left the ashram at the age of seventy. That is the time when everyone looks for stability, comfort and a good life but he said, "No. My time has come. I have not worked to bind myself to an institutional structure, nor do I want people or disciples to feel emotionally attached to me. I am just a follower of the instructions of my guru."

There came a time when he even renounced his guru clothes and started to live as an avadhoota. He would sleep on the floor without a mattress or covers. Even now he just sleeps on the floor, in winter too, without any covers at all. This is what is seen externally, but while he was doing all this, living the lifestyle of a paramahansa – a real paramahansa – he was also growing very fast psychically and spiritually.

The sadhanas which he was performing were lifting him up spiritually, taking him up beyond body awareness.

Now I will tell you what I have felt while observing this process, although one should not even try to describe it because it is a personal feeling. I have seen certain things which for me are very important in life, in order for one to live a complete life. I am speaking from my perspective on life and the purpose of life, from the perspective of a sannyasin.



He is a person who has never lost his vision in life. In the times of high status he always maintained clearly what he had to do. The desire to establish himself in his real nature was always at the forefront of his mind. Many times he also said, "When I took sannyasa I had a definite idea in mind that I had to discover what or who God is and what my relationship with God is."

When one takes sannyasa there is a feeling that one has to know oneself, attain self-realization, but in the course of time we find that sannyasins deviate from their original aim. They get caught up in the lifestyle of an institution, the status that disciples and institutions provide them with. The means becomes the end for them, but this did not happen in Paramahansa's life.

On one of Paramahansa's journeys around India after he had left the ashram he wrote:

*Let me roam alone on the banks of the rivers,
with the name of Shiva on my lips
and the image of Devi in my heart.
Let the ground be my bed and the sky my covering.
And when I die,
let it be like a whisper of wind in the grass.
Nobody should even know that I have died.
No gravestone should mark my grave.
Just like a wave in the ocean
that comes to the shore and then disappears,
that is how I want to live.*

This poem reflects his feeling about the state in which he lives, and clearly right now he has evolved to a very high state of consciousness. He doesn't move out from

his area, but he knows everything that is happening in the vicinity. One example, a real one, that I can give is that one day after practising his sadhana he got up, called Swami Satsangi and said, "In a village there is a woman who is an invalid, she has three children, her house has burnt down, go and help her." At that time, Sivananda Math had started making houses and working in the villages of the area. It took us three days to locate her. When we found the woman, her house had burned down three days ago and she was living under a tree with her three children. We immediately made a house and settled her there. But the main thing was, how did Paramahamsaji, while being in one small room, know what had happened to that woman so far away?

There is another story of a woman who had come one day to the hospital which we have built in Deoghar. The doctors had diagnosed her with intestinal TB, and it was in the final stage. The doctors said, "Sorry, we cannot do anything. Please go." Just as that woman was walking away, Paramahamsaji called someone and said, "Ask the woman who is leaving to stop, and ask the doctor to see me." When the doctor came, Paramahamsaji blew her up. He said, "How can you refuse medicine to a sick person?" The doctor said, "Swamiji, we have nothing to give her, it is the final stage of intestinal TB, and we don't have anything." Paramahamsaji said, "Give her three aspirins, she should take one a day."

On the fourth day, the woman came walking merrily down the road. When they checked her, they found absolutely no trace of abdominal TB. The doctor became very excited and wanted to inform Paramahamsaji about it. Paramahamsaji refused to

see either the doctor or the patient, but his grace had already worked.

When we see things like this happening in real life, what are we to think? Just as you shrug your shoulders, we also have to shrug our shoulders. There is no explanation for the things which he is doing now. He is working on a different, non-physical level and everyone is benefited by it. So, from a human being he has become a superbeing, from an ordinary person he has become a siddha.

Q. Swamiji, how early in your life did Paramahamsaji start sharing the experiences of his life with you?

Swamiji: Paramahamsaji has not spoken about his life to anybody, but I have been lucky. My earliest memory is from when I was six. I had come to the ashram and was living there. In the early days the ashram was just a tiny place and we used to sleep anywhere and everywhere. I don't know if you have seen the old ashram. Just as you enter the gate there is a tin shed. That used to be my sleeping place for ten years – every night put up a chowkie and make the bed. Every morning, wrap everything up and put it on top of the store.

One night when I was lying down, he came out. He called me and said, "Come, we will go for a walk." And we started walking around the gardens. That was the first time he told me about his life and what was happening. That is the first memory. That was the time he spoke about the growth of BSY. He said that it would be a centre where hundreds would come and study. That is coming true now. Many people have come, they have studied and gone, and

in a systematic, academic way. That prophesy is being fulfilled now.

Q. Did Paramahamsaji talk to you early in life about your own dharma, your own purpose? Or is that too personal?

Swamiji: I know that he has always guided me, even when I was not near him. Most of my life I have lived away from him and from Bihar School of Yoga. I was in India until the age of ten, but I was with him for only four or five years. In that time he taught me many things through yoga nidra. Then I left India and travelled around the world till 1983, so I was away from him, travelling in other places and had very little physical contact with him.

I returned to India when I was twenty-three and then from 1983 to 1988, I was with him again for five years. After that he left. So actually, in all my life I have spent only ten close years with him, the rest has been on and off, contact and away, but I have felt that I have always been instructed and guided by him. I know it to be true. I am sure he must have planted some seeds which in the course of time will grow and develop, although he has never formally told me so, but from the performance so far, I know he is satisfied.

Q. What is meant by ego?

Swamiji: Ego is a very loose term in English to describe the sense of individuality. This individuality which is represented by the ego is only a self-centred or self-oriented awareness. Ego also denotes a selfish or negative interaction of the individual self with the external environment. If we say, "I have an ego", it

means that I am not aware of my positivity; rather, I am more aware of my personal ambitions and needs.

There is a beautiful word in Sanskrit which describes the process of ego. The word is *ahamkara*, which means identity of the self, or identity of the individual being. In the yogic tradition it is said that when one is living in the manifest world, the ego manifests. This ego or *ahamkara* is the sense of individuality, the sense that “I am a unit”, a distinct unit of the supreme reality or consciousness. When this self-identity becomes involved with the *gunas* or the qualities of life, then its expression changes.

Q. Please speak on yoga as therapy.

Swamiji: There are three aspects of yoga practice: curative, preventive and promotive. The main thrust of yoga is promotion of human health. This is not confined to the physical body alone, but it is the total health of the human personality extending from the physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and psychic to the spiritual dimensions.

A good combination of the normal practices of yoga will improve one's health. One important thing here is that it needs to be a good combination of practices, just hatha yoga is not enough and just raja yoga is not enough. A human being combines the qualities of head, heart and hands. The head represents the rational, intellectual interaction. The heart represents emotions and the interaction of feelings and sensitivity. The hands represent the external interaction of the body and mind with society and the cosmos. If we only try to concentrate on one aspect of our life there is

bound to be imbalance. Therefore, there should be a good combination of practices to improve the overall health of the human personality.

Another aspect of yoga which is now emerging very strongly is the curative aspect, the therapeutic aspect. A lot of work has been done on the management of physical ailments and problems, and some work has been done on the management of mental problems and disorders. These are still considered to be specialized areas of yoga. In order to receive help it is necessary that one goes to a proper yoga teacher who understands the human nature.

The entire system of yoga in the tradition can be considered to be a form of psychotherapy in which one learns to manage the conscious, subconscious and unconscious behaviours of the mind. Those who have studied traditional yoga in the form of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali will have come across a statement, “Yoga is control of the modifications of mind.” In this classical text of yoga the entire approach is oriented towards teaching management of the human mind.

Physical practices of yoga play a very small part in the *Yoga Sutras*; only the meditative asanas have been described here. There are treatises which describe the systems of hatha yoga or bhakti yoga, but most of the yogic literature deals with the mind. This aspect of yoga is gradually coming to the forefront now and becoming a powerful tool in the management of mental, emotional and psychic imbalances. From our understanding, it is possible to treat different mental imbalances and reach a normal state through the practices of yoga, but it takes time, no doubt. If somebody is under medical treatment, then combining that treatment with yoga psychotherapy will be very useful.

The third aspect of yoga is preventive. This is where with the help of the practices of yoga we reach an optimal state of health now, and avoid symptoms of stress and tension which can create an imbalance.

Q. In a meeting we had many years ago, Swami Satyananda said I must become a swami. What is the concrete meaning of this?

Swamiji: Why haven't you become one? You see, ‘swami’ is not a religious word; it represents a state of being. It is not monkhood; it denotes the state of total control over the mind. *Swami* means master of oneself, *swa* meaning self and *ami* meaning master. It represents a practitioner of yoga who is aspiring to go deep into the system to perfect himself. Even while living a normal life, it is possible to have the attitudes and the lifestyle of a swami. Of course there are certain disciplines which one has to follow. In these disciplines we try to observe the nature of the mind and develop the positive qualities in life.

Usually we tend to identify more with a concept than with the practice. If I initiate somebody into sannyasa, they think they are already evolved beings and that they have reached a certain level. They forget that in the tradition of sannyasa the degree is given first and the thesis comes later. The degree which is given first represents the trust and the faith that the teacher or guru has in you.

The guru hopes that in the course of your life you can write a few pages of your thesis, but as soon as we get the degree we display it on the wall and say that we are perfect. That way, instead of improving we actually deteriorate. In fact, there are many people



who become more egoistic, self-centred, negative, selfish and horrible.

The understanding or the knowledge of sannyasa has to evolve naturally from within. Sannyasa means an inner harmony which expresses itself externally and which affects every other being with whom we come in contact. A swami represents an aspirant who is striving to reach that level of perfection. When you perfect the state of swami, you become a paramahamsa. When you are at the level of a paramahamsa, you have to work hard to perfect yourself in another dimension.

In the world you work first and then get your certificate. In spiritual life you get your aim first and then you have to work towards that aim, so that from the very first stage you are aware of the direction in which you have to go. So, be a sincere aspirant, and that way one day you will become a swami too.

Q. What should the relationship between guru and disciple be?

Swamiji: First we have to understand the word guru and then we have to understand the word disciple. Guru means a person who can guide us in our process of evolution and, most specifically, to become stable in our spiritual life. Nowadays the word guru is being used very loosely all over the place. In India, even the rikshaw-puller or the taxi driver is known as guru, but of course the term is used here as slang for a person who can take us to our destination.

The meaning of the word *guru* is dispeller of darkness. One who can give you a new, positive, creative vision of life, so that you can experience the

inner, universal creativity within you. Therefore, the actual meaning of guru is in the spiritual sense and not in the physical sense.

The word disciple should also be understood. It does not mean a pupil or a student. It means someone who has the urge to realize the inner self and is able to sincerely follow the guidelines given by the guru. The word for disciple in Sanskrit is *shishya*, which means one who can surrender the ego. When one can surrender or let go of that individual identity, then one is a disciple.

The relationship between guru and disciple is not just academic; it is experienced at many other levels. In the life story of Milarepa, his guru did not teach him meditation, he did not call him to any satsang, instead he worked him like a slave: carrying stones, making houses, then breaking them down and building at some other place. Consider that you are the spiritual seeker in Milarepa's place. If you had to only carry stones from one site to the next for many years, what would you think? "This guru is crazy, I have not come here for this kind of work; I have come for my spiritual realization." You would have left him within a week and gone to find someone else who dressed according to your beliefs and inclinations.

For us, the guru has to fit in our compartment and we do not have to fit in the guru's compartment. Therefore we do not find many gurus in the world now. Nowadays people have even started to divorce their gurus. In this way, an internal link can never be created. The link which is created naturally between guru and disciple is of simplicity and purity. This link is the factor which unites the spirit of the guru with that of the disciple and at the spiritual level they become one.

You must have heard of the Indian epic, *Ramayana*. There is a story in it where somebody asks Hanuman of his relationship with Rama. He gives a very beautiful answer: "Externally, physically, I am working for him, I am his servant. Mentally and emotionally, he is my friend. Spiritually, there is no difference between him and me."

This is the sentiment of love and simplicity and purity which evolves between guru and disciple. Definitely it is a very deep and abiding relationship which can span lifetimes.

Q. Could you tell us about Paramahamsaji's purpose in November–December?

Swamiji: You must have received his invitation and many things are stated in that. The invitation is from him, but it is not for him. It is for people who wish to see him. After people came to know that he is living where he is now, they started knocking on his door without consideration for what he is doing.

He is definitely involved in a very high sadhana, going beyond the stage of paramahamsa and passing through the stage of avadhoota. An avadhoota is a person who is transcending the body and world consciousness. In the state of avadhoota one is constantly in a state similar to ecstasy. When Paramahamsaji left the ashram, as per the guidelines he had received from his guru, he started performing higher sadhanas. In order to stabilize himself in the practices and that state of consciousness, he had to isolate himself from everyone. There comes a stage in the life of a sannyasin when there has to be isolation so that he can live in a perpetual state of sadhana.

When there are distractions with people coming and going, the mind is not fixed in sadhana. These distractions definitely do not aid the process for a spiritual aspirant. He had given a clear indication that nobody should disturb him. He went so far as to say that we should consider him dead. He said very clearly, "Do not come and see me at all." Why? Because whatever he had to teach he had taught. It has all been written and published and people have to just understand what is already there in order to evolve.

As always, people are not satisfied with such answers because of their emotional attachment. At every odd hour they would go and disturb him, so he said, "Okay, those who want to see me can come during this month. I will see them, give them instructions and after that I am not going to see anyone." So, it may even be the last opportunity that we will have to physically come into contact with him, or maybe after a few years he may again give darshan. It all depends on him. It is an opportunity which has been given to connect not only with him, but with the higher purpose of life.

What he is doing now is not the ordinary yoga to which we are exposed. The practices of paramahansa sannyasins are very different. Through these practices the sannyasin develops a very strong control over the physical elements. In the state of siddhi one controls nature and the elements, not only externally but also within the body.

One example of his sadhana is the panchagni sadhana. From January to June he performs this particular vedic sadhana in which he has to sit surrounded by fires. Do not ask me why or how because I will not tell you the reason and you would

not understand it either. This belongs to a higher level of sadhana and spiritual experience, so I will only describe what one can feel physically.

Four fires are burnt, one at the front, one at the back, one on each side. The summer Indian sun is the fifth fire. Where he sits in the middle, the temperature goes up to ninety degrees. He practises that in summer. What he does there is his personal affair, but this is just to give you an indication of the heat that his body, at the age of seventy-four, has to survive. At the end of his sadhana period his body looks like burnt copper. If you look into his eyes, you will not be able to look straight at him. They are like balls of fire looking straight through you, burning through you.

There are other sadhanas which are meant for different seasons of the year and he is performing all those. Not because he needs them but, in my understanding, to create a tradition of sadhana for paramahansa sannyasins, because there has been a decline in the tradition of sannyasa. People have become involved in the fulfilment of ambitions through sannyasa. They want to build empires and they lose the original vision for which they took sannyasa. Sannyasa represents a constant evolutionary process of the human consciousness. The purity of the tradition is again being established with whatever he is doing.

This is an opportunity to reconnect with him and with the spiritual direction he is trying to guide us all into. That does not mean that you will be required to sit among four fires. You are required to have a vision of what spirituality is and how far you can go.



Q. What is the quality required to love and to be loved?

Swamiji: To become the symbol of love. Love is something which I have not understood properly and fully. I feel that which is known as love is not the real expression. Sensorial satisfaction of any kind is definitely not love. Emotional fulfilment is definitely not love. Intellectual rapport is not love and possessiveness is not love. These are the traits which we put together and call love.

When we talk of love, we think of emotional happiness and fulfilment, intellectual rapport, sensorial and even sensual fulfilment, and with this the feeling of possessiveness also comes very strongly. All these combined together give us a sense of external security and create attachments. When we try to project love to somebody, it is always done with a personal, selfish attitude. Please do not mind, I may be absolutely wrong. I am only expressing my understanding so far. I have never been able to see these traits as love.

I feel that love is something more, a deep unifying force. There have been very few people in the world who have experienced true love. This true love is a force which, when experienced, dominates the entire human nature.

Swami Sivananda, our grandfather guru, used to say that there are two kinds of love: conditional love and unconditional love. In the conditional love there are many different categories: love in order to gain social status, love in order to gain emotional satisfaction, love in order to possess something, and so on. The unconditional love relates to an individual

and the divine, and gives rise to a universal feeling of affection for everyone; it is love for everyone and not just for our near and dear ones.

It is the unconditional love, which when we are able to express, is returned to us a thousandfold. In conditional love, there can be clashes and it is affected by attractions and repulsions, but in unconditional love there is only giving, without any expectation of a result. That is also known as bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga is giving the pure nature of your heart to others. In order to give that pure nature of yourself to humanity and to God, you have to come to that level of perfection.

Q. I have received a mantra from Swami Satyananda, but cannot feel that it is mine. I want to be able to practise it intensely. Can you help me to feel this more deeply?

Swamiji: Many times we tend to rationalize the mantra. We think that the mantra must be according to our feeling. However, if we try to feel whether the mantra is suitable for us or not, then often the effect of the mantra becomes nil. We are adding our likes and dislikes to the mantra. The meaning or the purpose of practising mantra is to go beyond the normal expressions and experiences of attraction and repulsion, to acquire greater clarity of mind and awaken the psychic energy within.

Often, we are fixed in a particular expression of energy in our own system. When the seed of mantra is planted and it begins to grow, it pushes that fixed state of energy. It is like a seed breaking the ground as it becomes a sprout. At that time we begin to feel uncomfortable. We begin to feel that the mantra is not

right for us because our fixed pattern is being broken by the effect of the mantra. We begin to feel that something is wrong. "I do not like this, I am not able to concentrate." That does happen and will happen. The mantra has to break through the ground of the mind.

There is a fixed expression of energy which regulates and controls the external world, but when we are dealing with the psychic, pranic and spiritual levels, they do not conform to the external world. The expression of this world is different from that of the manifest world. Therefore, that feeling of not being comfortable with the mantra is bound to come up. If you expect to receive a mantra with which you will feel very nice and comfortable, then be sure that the mantra will not be effective. You do not have to look for that feeling. It is not as if when you practise your mantra tonight you begin to think, "Do I feel good or do I feel bad?" It has to be a natural and spontaneous expression.

When we chip a stone to make a statue, it hurts. If the statue says, "Do not chip me, I do not want to be a statue", then it is put aside and everyone forgets about it. However, when a nice statue is made, everyone looks at it and admires it. So, as a yoga practitioner, you should be ready to chip yourself so that a new you can emerge for everyone to admire, for everyone to see your beauty.

Q. Could you say something about the concept of sankalpa?

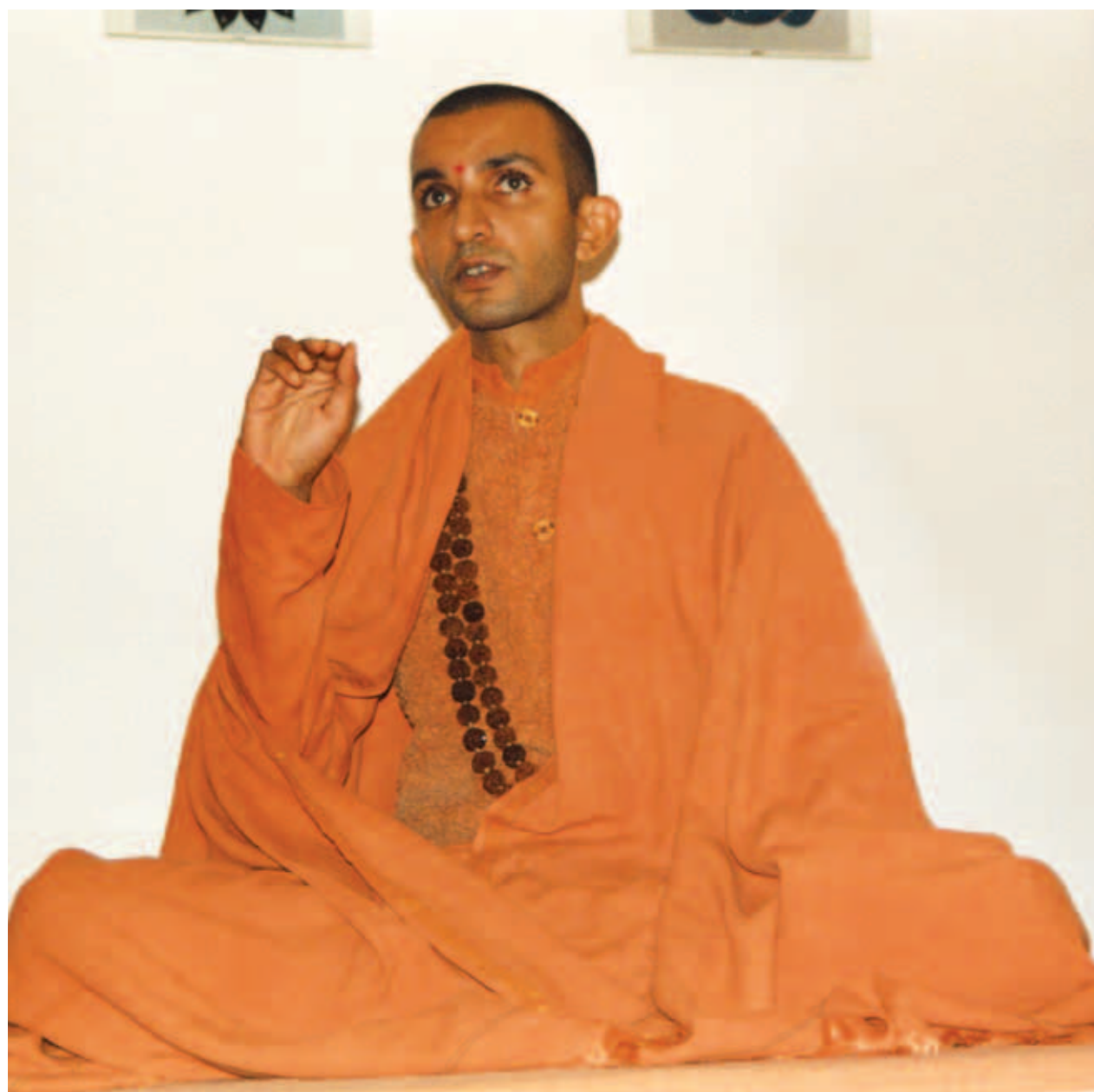
Swamiji: Sankalpa increases the sensitivity and potentiality of the mind. It increases the willpower. Initially, through a form of positive suggestion, it

takes you to the psychic dimension, where the mind is sensitized and where the faculties of mind have a lot of force. In the initial stages, sankalpa is used to focus the mental energies, and in the later stages it builds up the psychic energy. To begin with, externally it may seem like a form of auto-suggestion, but it prepares the ground for harmony to express itself within you and sharpens the faculties of the mind. Thus, in brief, the purpose of sankalpa is sensitizing the mind to deal with the energies within and also to focus the mental energies to a point where they become powerful like a laser beam.

Q. Is there a book or a series of books that you would suggest to us for growth, besides the classical yoga books?

Swamiji: In order to perfect your own practice and become stable in yoga, I am sure you must have across the book *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* which contains the asana and pranayama practices and shows how to perfect them. There is also the book *Yoga Nidra*, enabling you to perfect the states of relaxation. That will make you go deeper into your subconscious and unconscious and remove any blocks or inhibitions which may be there in order to awaken the potential of energy within you and awaken the chakras.

There are many more books, one series is known as *Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati* and another is *Kundalini Tantra*. I think these books should give you an overall concept of the different yogic practices ranging from the body to the level of chakras and kundalini. Then there is another book called *Meditations from the Tantras*.



Q. How can our yoga practices develop our creativity in art and music?

Swamiji: Meditation has been found to be helpful in the perfection of creativity. Of course there has to be a systematic process of meditation. The practices of meditation in yoga lead one from an external state of mind to a highly receptive internal state. The entire system of yoga initially aims to develop human creativity. The traditional view of the yoga practices is that they aim to develop the potential of human consciousness. When we practise the physical yoga, activation of pranas takes place within the body.

People come to yoga for various reasons. Some come to improve the state of their body. Some come to find better health and flexibility. Some come to learn how to manage their stress and tension. Some come with high spiritual aims. Some come with a desire to learn meditation. Yoga practitioners have many different aims which they wish to attain through their practice.

Hatha yoga is considered important by those who wish to get in tune with their bodies, as the practices of asana and pranayama are now being defined as part of hatha yoga. Very few people have been exposed to the traditional methods of raja yoga, yet it is one of the most important yogas for people in present-day society. In the system of raja yoga we find a series of practices which take one from the body to realization of the inner nature. In the context of the question, I would like to tell you in brief about raja yoga.

Raja yoga has been traditionally described as the eightfold path. The first two practices are yama and niyama, which are codes of external conduct and

disciplines to imbibe in life. After this come the practices of asana and pranayama which are for improving the health of the physical body and the receptivity of the brain. After asana and pranayama, in the fifth and sixth stages of raja yoga come the practices of pratyahara and dharana. Here, the energies of the mind are focused. With greater concentration we are able to perform optimally, using our creativity in life. Following pratyahara and dharana are the practices of dhyana and samadhi. Dhyana means higher meditation which culminates in the realization of the inner self. The state of that realization is known as samadhi.

So in the practices of raja yoga, we deal with four aspects of our life. Yamas and niyamas deal with human behaviour and interaction in society. A refinement of personality takes place with the practices of yamas and niyamas, so that the qualities which we use in our normal life improve and we are provided with a greater sense of inner stability and discipline. Thus the aspect of behaviour is managed with the practices of yamas and niyamas. Then we learn to manage the various imbalances of the body with the practices of asana and pranayama. In the practices of pratyahara and dharana, the fifth and the sixth stages of raja yoga, we learn to manage the dissipated states of mind. In the seventh and eighth stages of raja yoga, we learn to manage the psychic states of our personality.

For the development of any kind of creativity, yoga says that the mind must be managed properly. The definition of creativity in yoga is giving your best to the action that you are performing at present, in which beauty, harmony and strength are perfected. This harmony can be used and applied in any state in life. With proper application, one finds that there is

a deep harmony between the action of an individual and the aim which the individual is trying to reach. Disharmony in idea, action and aim defines lack of creativity. So in meditation, or through the meditative process, we try to harmonize these three areas.

There is a story about Michelangelo in which he said, "I do not do any sculpting, but I bring out the image that is already in the stone by removing the unnecessary pieces from the stone." Put yourself in his shoes. Would you bring out the image in the stone or would you carve the image of your mind in the stone? Most of us would try to carve the stone according to the concepts that we create every moment in our mind. Real creativity is not applying one's mind to something, but seeing the reality behind the appearance. When one realizes the real reality and not the apparent reality, that is the expression of total creativity. In order to have that perception, that concept, it is necessary to fine-tune the mind.

Imagine what would happen if we turned on the television and saw ten different stations on one channel all playing at the same time. That happens in our mind all the time. Our mind normally does not have the ability to identify the different impressions which are being generated in even one channel of the mind. Therefore the nature of the mind is always dissipated. Too many things are seen and observed unconsciously and the faculties are not able to focus themselves in one direction. So, meditation becomes an important process by which we can eventually identify the various channels of the mind.

Meditation begins with the state of pratyahara. Normally when we begin to practise meditation without a clear concept of meditation, it is a process

of imagination and fantasy. According to the yogic concepts, meditation has to be a process of self-discovery. This process begins with extension of the awareness to the world around us and not by withdrawing ourselves from the world. This is where many of us make a mistake. We begin to withdraw ourselves from the world without being aware of the influences of the environment. When we extend the perceptions externally there is extension of the faculties of mind into the environment. This extension of qualities is combined with the aspect of complete awareness. When this awareness becomes active in perception and in action, then the meditative process begins.

In the next stage, we start to bring our attention to a point where we can focus the mental energies. In meditation there is a gradual process of training the mental attention. One of these practices begins with mantra. In order to naturally focus the attention on one specific point, yoga suggests the practice of mantra meditation.

With the practice of mantra we affect different layers of our personality at the same time. At one level, we are focusing our mind by withdrawing it from the world of senses which we have identified with. We are providing the mind and the attention with an object or point of concentration. At another level, we are also altering the normal state of human consciousness by increasing the sensitivity and receptivity of consciousness. At another level, we are increasing the harmony of the pranas in our personality. Pranas are the energies that govern the body, emotions, mind and the subtle aspects of our personality. At another level, we are also increasing

the qualities of the strengths which are inherent within us, such as the ability to deal with tensions and stress, developing willpower, developing clarity of mind, attaining inner states of relaxation and balance, thus providing greater control over the normal human actions and reactions.

Eventually mantra teaches us how to act and not react. It is the normal tendency of human beings to react. In this process we never act. We react to the environment and the external influences; we react to our own expressions of emotions and behaviour and other people's behaviour. Reacting is something which is very natural in our life. Action is something which we have not learned yet. Action is not work or performance; rather, it is the harmony which expresses itself externally. Harmony in action, leading to perfection, is the art of action. In meditation it is possible to come to that level of understanding, and applying that understanding in normal life leads to enhanced creativity.

So, I will suggest that first of all, in any kind of yoga practice, try to increase the level of awareness. Include awareness not only in yoga practice, but also in the day to day activities. In the course of time, this awareness will give you an understanding of the cause and effect of a particular action, attitude or behaviour. Later on, follow a systematic meditative process in which you do not try to avoid the external situation by withdrawing yourself, but where you are able to evolve a deep understanding of yourself and the environment. Perfection in this state will lead to creativity. So, awareness and meditative understanding are two practices which you can begin

with and when you have the opportunity, go deep into the practices of raja yoga.

Q. What, in your opinion, are the qualities of a true disciple?

Swamiji: I do not think that there are specific qualities of a disciple. Rather, it is the use and effective application of the normal qualities which makes someone a disciple. I was mentioning earlier that a disciple is not a student or a pupil. Discipleship is a state of mind, where there is receptivity, harmony and unity.

This receptivity and harmony is with the self and the world; it is receptivity to one's nature, harmony with the world and union with the concept of guru or God. When these three things manifest in the life of a person, then the nature of the disciple manifests externally and also internally.

One cannot be a musician without the knowledge of music and the effective application of that knowledge. One cannot be a doctor without the knowledge of medicine. In order to become a good doctor, there has to be application of that knowledge. In the same way, one cannot be a good disciple without knowledge of the link that an individual has with society, nature and God.

Right application of that knowledge takes place in the life of a disciple in the form of receptivity, harmony and a sense of full union, surrender. Surrender does not mean letting go of your control over yourself and allowing someone else to direct you. Again, it is the right application of your knowledge and strength. Imagine that you have to swim across a river. How would you do it? Against the current or with the

current? Normally you swim with the current and not against the current, so that the current also helps you move forward. That is an example of letting go, surrendering.

When you begin to flow with life naturally and spontaneously while making an effort to move forward also, then your effort and the flow, both together take you to your destination. Your effort is then in harmony with an uncontrolled force. You do not control the force of the water and the current, yet you can move with it.

The same principle applies in spiritual life. Surrender is harmony of personal effort with the force which carries you forward. Normally we tend to struggle, which creates more mental difficulties and problems. There is a famous song, 'The answer my friend, is blowing in the wind . . .' You just have to tune yourself with that to become a good disciple.

Q. How important is it to have a guru in one's spiritual life?

Swamiji: In my opinion, the presence of a guru is very important in one's spiritual life. It is not only a philosophical concept, but a real physical need. When I was living in the United States, many people would say to me, "One doesn't need a guru, one has to realize the inner guru." I used to say to them, "If you think that the internal guru is enough to guide you in your life, then I am sure that you have the ability to live with an internal wife or husband without having any external need for them."

Just as there is need of external support for a sense of fulfilment and interaction in other areas of life, one

also needs an external guru to fulfil the spiritual life. I do not see spirituality only as internal and practical life only as external. Spirituality is a part of practical life and practical life is a part of spirituality.

In the traditional systems of Indian thought it has been said that there are four aspects of human life which need to be fulfilled in order to lead a perfectly balanced, healthy, happy and spiritual life. These four aspects are known as artha, kama, dharma and moksha. *Artha* means security – external, social security. Such security in society is provided by means of a family, finance, a position, status and respect. Guru also forms part of this security.

Kama means the fulfilment of desires. The desires with which we normally identify are self-centred or self-oriented and external. At the same time, there are deeper desires in the mind which enable one to find peace within. In order to help channel these inner desires and to achieve a state of fulfilment, a guru is needed.

Dharma means knowledge of human commitment to society and to life. We are well aware of our commitments in life because we have been educated and trained that way, but we are not aware of the commitment in life to our spiritual growth. Due to this unclear concept, there is generally a conflict between our moral, religious and spiritual views. That is one reason why there is so much disparity and imbalance between different thoughts. There is also an imbalance in the human understanding of these thoughts. In order to evolve the concept of spiritual dharma in one's life, there is the need of a guru.

Moksha is the desire and drive to attain freedom and liberation. In order to guide one on the path of moksha,

there is the need of a guru. So guru is an integral part and also the need of a human being at every level.

Now we have to understand who can be a guru. We tend to confuse our ideas of guru with the real concept. The literal meaning of the word *guru* is dispeller of darkness. In this sense, the guru is a person who has experienced the different stages of life, who has perfected himself or herself in a state of being, who understands the limitations and potentials of human nature, and who can inspire you to tread the spiritual path with firm conviction and knowledge. In this sense, guru is the person who guides you spiritually.

Teachers are not gurus. I am a teacher, I am not a guru. Guruhood is something that one cannot attain; rather, it is a state of experience. Gurus never say that they are gurus, they are always disciples. There is no ego, there is no label of "I am". A person who can lead a simple life with clarity of mind and not mess around with the comforts and luxuries of life can be a real guru. They can definitely live in the world, but they do not have the self-oriented attitude towards objects of the world. They have a universal vision and are able to lend a helping hand to everyone. How to find a guru? Don't ask me. You have to intuitively feel that.

Q. In spite of my enthusiasm, I am not always consistent with my willpower to practise my sadhana. How can I achieve this consistency?

Swamiji: I do not think there is a straight answer to this because the effort must come from you. You must feel the need and you must have the drive. If you do not feel the need and you do not have the drive, then it will not be necessary for you to practise.

Generally, one eats food to satisfy hunger, one drinks to satisfy thirst. There is a sense of need and a desire to make an effort. If you think intellectually “I need”, but you are not able to provide yourself with the proper motivation and drive, then I would say wait for some more time.

Q. Can you please speak about kirtan as a practice of yoga.

Swamiji: Kirtan is part of mantra yoga and mantra yoga is part of bhakti yoga. Although we identify the names sung in kirtans with mythological or historical figures, they do not represent a mythological or historical belief or concept. Rather, they represent a combination of sounds which stimulate the dimension of vibration in human nature.

Take the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* for example. Those who have some kind of religious background say that this mantra means “Salutations to Shiva”. Yoga has a different view on it, and yoga predates any kind of religious belief. People ask, “Why do I have to chant *Om Namah Shivaya* when I am not a follower of Shiva? Can I chant something else?” I have to explain the entire process of the mantra system to them: that from the yogic viewpoint, mantras are sound vibrations which alter the expressions and nature of the human personality.

In order to understand this perspective, we need to go into the concepts of kundalini yoga. According to the principles and theories of kundalini yoga, there are seven chakras in our body. These represent centres of energy and dimensions of consciousness. The chakras can be stimulated by different sound frequencies and



are represented symbolically by lotus flowers with different numbers of petals. Each petal carries with it a mantra or sound vibration.

According to the level of evolution and the need of activation of energy, a mantra is given. *Om*, for example, is the beeja mantra or seed mantra of ajna chakra, the eye of intuition or the third eye. Similarly, the syllables *Na, Ma, Shi, Va* and *Ya* are mantras related to different chakras in the body. So, when we repeat the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*, we are not remembering a mythological or historical figure, but we are concentrating on these different chakras. This particular mantra activates ajna, vishuddhi, anahata and swadhisthana chakras: the eyebrow centre, the throat centre, the heart centre and the sacral centre, and the different states of consciousness which they represent.

As part of mantra practice, the mantra can be repeated mentally, or whispered, or spoken aloud, or sung. Mental and whispering repetition of the mantra takes one into a meditative state. Initially, in order to get used to the sound, one should whisper it. When one has become stable in the pronunciation of the mantra, it can be repeated mentally. For increasing the sensitivity of the mind, whispering and mental repetition of the mantra are suggested. In the meditative state when there is introversion of the senses and the mind, we may become drowsy and sleepy. We may lose that self-control where we are alert and aware. At that moment, to focus the mind on the mantra, it should be chanted aloud.

In order to harmonize the energy field of the body with the state of consciousness, mantras are sung with music. Music itself has a certain effect

on the mind. Hyperactivity can be reduced with the help of music. Aggression can be channelled through music and a passive person can be activated through music. So, music can definitely alter the state of consciousness. When mantra is combined with music, it becomes a very powerful tool for awakening the entire personality.

Mantras which are sung with music are known as kirtans. Kirtan is also a way to channel the emotions. Emotions are a very powerful force over which there is no control. Emotions represent the raw state of the manifest energy. Fiery energy manifests in the form of anger or aggression. Water energy manifests in the form of fear and depression. Earth energy manifests in the form of deep psychological fear and insecurity. Air energy manifests in the form of conditional love and affection.

With the singing of kirtan it becomes possible to eventually change the quality of these emotions. We can channel them in another direction towards realization of the divine nature or God within us. When done properly, kirtan can become a powerful tool to attain inner realization in a very short time. The force of emotion raises the level of energy and alters the state of consciousness and creates a fusion of the individual mind with the cosmic mind. Kirtans are used to have an experience of this state. That is the real purpose of kirtan.



I do not see spirituality only as internal and practical life only as external. Spirituality is a part of practical life and practical life is a part of spirituality.

Impressions...

One single current

Swami Anandananda Saraswati

It was in the early morning, as I came out of my room along the corridor of the kitchen building in Ganga Darshan that I saw Swami Niranjan for the first time in person (I had already met him in a dream). Our meeting was just eye contact, brief but full, and there was a reciprocal recognition. It must have taken just a few seconds, and we both kept moving in our respective directions.

That day was my birthday, and on that evening I was initiated into sannyasa by Paramahamsaji. Swami Niranjan was present, and called the names of the new swamis as we received our dhotis, malas, and directions from our guru. That same day, Swami Niranjan had also been nominated as President of BSY. For me, the arrival of Swami Niranjan and his role in the ashram is spontaneously connected with my being here too. There is no thinking about it or trying to assess it.

He opened a new experience for me, which was that I could talk and relate to him as a friend, something which I could not really do with Paramahamsaji because of an overwhelming sense of respect. What has really struck me is this spontaneous, open and playful relationship, and I feel that I have really accepted him in my life because I was also accepted by him. He makes me feel a member of the ashram 'family'.

Since then I have been coming regularly to Ganga Darshan every year. In January 1989, during one



of my visits, I was in my room with a cold and fever and heard a knock on the door. When I opened it, I saw Swami Niranjan standing there with a smile and at that time I felt an explosion of love in my heart. It was exactly the same experience that I'd previously had with Paramahamsaji, and in fact it was then that I perceived the guru aspect of Swamiji, thus completing the different aspects of our relationship. As different aspects intermingle, there are still times when I relate to him as a friend, as a companion, as an older brother, as a guru brother and as an inspirer or guru.

In more recent times, I have heard him speak of different qualities and capacities of Paramahamsaji and I perceive them in him. When I think of him, or speak about him now, it isn't as the successor of Paramahamsaji, or as his chief disciple, because to me the idea of a successor suggests a separate entity. I think of him as an extension of Paramahamsaji, like when two electric wires are joined or welded together, they conduct one single current which travels over the whole distance. I rejoice when I consider how lucky I am to have one guru in two different bodies.

Thirst for knowledge

Swami Chidprakash Saraswati

I met Swami Niranjan for the first time in 1987. I was twenty-five years old and he was twenty-seven. Just like with Paramahamsaji before, I always had a deep understanding with him. Sometimes, during his satsang, it seemed as if he could read my mind, because his words referred to the thoughts and situations I was just experiencing in that particular moment, but I wasn't



able to understand them in the plain and clear way explained by Swamiji.

I didn't have a lot of contact with Swamiji, in any case no more frequent than with Paramahamsaji. From Paramahamsaji I received initiation into karma sannyasa and from Swamiji I received initiation into poorna sannyasa in 1993 on the day of Diwali.

I think my connection with Swamiji was a little more aware than the one with Paramahamsaji, but actually

I always had the perception that they were not two people, but only one person! Behind Swamiji I always felt the presence of Paramahamsaji, just like behind Paramahamsaji there's always been – I realize now – the presence of the great Sivanandaji.

I always felt Swami Niranjan was a friendly person. He was often genial, playful and simple, with a subtle sense of humour; at the same time, he had a great talent to always teach you something new, something

you didn't understand before, and his voice betrayed a strong personality, one who holds a high moral stature.

For me Swami Niranjan is the one with whom I can have a physical or verbal connection; recently this has not been tangible due to my diminished presence in India and his various programs.

To explain some of my experiences with Swamiji, I need to tell three episodes.





In 1993, the Bihar School of Yoga's golden jubilee year, I received initiation into poorna sannyasa. I had just arrived at Ganga Darshan with the Italian group, we were settling our baggage in a room downstairs, in the place where the reception now is, and it was getting dark. Suddenly a person in our group had a peculiar experience. He was thrown into ecstasies and started to tremble all over. We asked him if he was feeling ill, but he answered he was fine and he was just feeling a great energy rising inside him, making him tremble that way. We made him breathe deeply with his hands up, and slowly everything returned to normal.

While all these things were happening, I was looking out from the door and saw a swami playing the flute, hiding himself behind some bushes. Paying attention, I discovered to my great astonishment that the swami playing the flute was Swami Niranjana. I felt he was greeting with his music the great power lodging in my fellow-countryman; he became aware of its presence and was paying homage to it. This was my perception and my experience.

After 1993, I saw Swamiji again in 1994, when he came to Italy. Later on, I went through many changes in my life and was always very busy. I went to India in 2001 for the Maha Kumbha Mela and then I went to Rikhia, but I didn't meet Swami Niranjana. I only met him in 2004, ten years after our last meeting.

From 1998 to 2000, while I was completely immersed in my business (building of Tara Centre, my son Jonathan's birth, my job, teaching yoga, etc.), suddenly I began to be interested in Indian philosophy, tantra, Vedanta and other traditional Indian darshans, that had never interested me before or never had a

priority in my life until that moment. Now they were arising in me and suddenly I was feeling like someone thirsty in the desert with an urgent need of water. A sudden thirst for knowledge broke out in me. Not long after I received a letter from Swamiji announcing the birth of the first yoga university recognized by the Indian government, the Bihar Yoga Bharati, and I understood the reason for such a thirst for knowledge.

In 2006, Swami Niranjana came to Italy, in Venice, and afterwards I saw him again in 2008 in Sturnjan, Slovenia. There, in a satsang, he told us about spiritual life and he said it's impossible to connect the plug into the spiritual and earthly world simultaneously. These words made me think . . . on the one hand I knew he said so because such was his experience, and therefore that was the way things work; on the other hand, I couldn't understand, because my experience was absolutely different. So I played a kind of game. I tried to enter inside Swami Niranjana's head – and I saw him sitting in a meditative pose. His body was huge and impenetrable, I couldn't interfere with his thoughts until I finally could get in and saw that the body sitting in that position was the one on earth communicating with us, while another Swami Niranjana, made of pure light, was coming out from a sort of trapdoor in his head and he was walking happily, taking a trip in a world inhabited by light beings. When my meditation finished, I wasn't able to understand rationally the things I experienced, but my entire being was sure that I had understood who Swami Niranjana really was, what his real inner mood was and what he was experiencing.

These are some of my experiences with my guru, Swami Niranjana.

The force of guru

Swami Gyanavilasananda Saraswati

When I think of Swami Niranjana, his sweet smile appears before my eyes, his reassuring smile, and I can feel his great force, the force of the guru.

I would like to tell a nice story which took place some years ago . . . in that experience I discovered Swamiji's great understanding and profound humility.

One day, Swamiji, some swamis and me, were in a restaurant in Delhi. It was a Continental restaurant and we could choose different kinds of meals, European, American and Indian. As usual, I had trouble with spicy Indian food and hesitated in choosing my meal. I was very embarrassed, Swamiji was there and I did not want to make a bad impression, but at the same time I had my annoying stomach problems. One of the swamis made fun of me and advised me to take a spicy Indian dish. I was very embarrassed and while I was thinking what to do, Swamiji chose his meal . . . and very simply he said: Pizza! Pizza with mushrooms! My heart stopped beating fast and I relaxed. At last, I chose my meal: Italian food without any spice!

I am eternally grateful to Swamiji because I understood that life is easier than we think. We should be more flexible and accept everyone, with all qualities and faults, and we don't have the right to judge anyone.

When I meet Swamiji, I feel that he can release my emotions. His energy goes straight to my heart, and I feel right there, in hridayakasha, an emotion of deep love, the love that we know as bhakti, devotion.



The ideal model of disciple

Swami Ishananda Saraswati

The first time I met Swami Niranjana Saraswati, it was at Ganga Darshan in December 1987.

At that time, every afternoon, Swami Satyananda gave satsang to resident sannyasins in the ashram. Sannyasins, while waiting for his arrival, sang kirtan and I usually followed them with closed eyes, knowing that when they stopped I could see him sitting before me.

That day, reopening my eyes, sitting in the place of Swami Satyananda, I saw a young sannyasin who I did not know, had never seen in the ashram, had never before heard of.

My neighbour told me that he was called Nirajan and it was clear that he would be giving the satsang. I felt a sensation of irritation and disappointment because I thought, after all, I have had to endure many problems and travelled thousands of kilometres to be able to enjoy the physical presence of my guru and receive his direct teachings. So, a little annoyed and prejudiced, I began to listen to the words of Swami Nirajan. After just a few minutes his words went straight to my heart, opening it with unconditional approval.

The theme of the satsang was guru-disciple relationship. I had never heard anyone talking about his own guru with so much love and devotion and be able to transmit those feelings in such a tangible way. From that moment onwards, Swami Nirajan represented for me the ideal model of disciple that I was trying to become. He was the source of inspiration helping me to understand the role of a real disciple, to reinforce my



path of sannyasa and to intensify my devotion towards Paramahamsaji.

It was only years after that I became aware of the tasks which had been entrusted to him by his guru. Only in 1995 in Rikhia when Paramahamsaji passed on to Swami Niranjan all his spiritual knowledge and appointed him as his successor, I really understood what a great person he was.

Recognizing him as the master who knows how to bring forward in such a true way the teachings and the mission of his guru, who knows how to spread to thousands of people around the world not only practices of yoga, but real spirituality with inspiration and love, I feel deeply in my heart that he is the living emanation of Paramahamsa Satyananda.

Laughing eyes

Sn. Kriyashakti

Often, some external element induces us to consider our thoughts or our behaviour, but sometimes we are led to go deeper inside. That is what happened when Swami Anandananda asked me if I'd like to share my experiences from the encounters with Swami Niranjanananda. As the door of memories opened, forgotten images and feelings appeared still vivid.

In 1994, it was only a few months since I had come in contact with the Satyananda School in Italy. I attended the convention in Rimini mostly out of curiosity. Sincerely, I don't remember any of Swamiji's lectures and neither was I hit by the desire to receive any initiation. What hit me – and it is still etched clear

in my mind and which I now realize worked deep inside – was his being, his behaviour. It was the joy to sing and play, being completely transported with kirtans, but at the same time always present. A young person with laughing eyes, but whose profundity, knowingness and awareness was very clear.

Since then, without knowing how, I began to develop the feeling of being part of a 'family', a community of people with which I had a link, even without seeing each other very often. Then I began to attend all the seminars I could go to, and then came the first journey to India for the Sat Chandi Mahayajna when Paramahamsaji gave to Swami Niranjan the crystal mala and crystal lingam. That scene is still before my eyes and in my heart. They were moments when a hardly expressible feeling of inner communion and oneness spread around . . . the night spent in Rikhia, almost camping but enjoying the atmosphere full of indescribable vibrations, which gave us incredible wellness. I also remember when I received my spiritual name and the inner feeling of change and clarity about what my task could be, and the mantra that over the years has been my anchor in innumerable situations.

There are more images of the one with the laughing eyes who at the same time has an incredible ability to listen and see. Perhaps too much of the ability to see, for it could break down the shield I had built in my life, so that I was always uncomfortable when I tried, in his presence, to play the role of 'leading student in class'.

In the following years I went on visiting, whenever possible, the Satyananda Centre with Swami Anandananda and Swami Shaktidhara who represented, for me, the connection with the original teachings.

There have been some other experiences in Rikhia and Munger; the end of the Teacher Training Course with the final examinations in Munger and the certificate received by Swami Niranjan with a discourse, still vivid in my ears, by which he reminded us that the certificate isn't a point of arrival, but a starting point.

Then there was the convention in Venice. It was really nice to see so many people arriving from different countries in Europe and beyond Europe, everyone happy to stay together, listen to the lectures and enjoy the presence of Swami Niranjan. For me, the coming of Swamiji in Italy represented many different emotions and opportunities. In the afternoon, before the beginning of the convention, there was a meeting between Swamiji and all the persons engaged in seva, and he gave each of us a white kurta-pajama to make us recognizable to ourselves and other participants. That was, indeed the first gift of unity and community. Then the convention. I lived through it as if I was in a trance. It was only marked by his words, jokes, glances, each of them full of teaching. The tears of emotion while, together with Gangashakti, we waited to come into the hall to receive karma sannyasa, and the magic moment when I felt something like an internal explosion and an incredible clearness about what my commitment had to be. And finally, the joy and total well-being during the kirtans and the culmination with the havan on the shores of the Lido.

These are the first images and the first emotions that came to my mind when Swami Anandananda asked me to write this. Then, little by little, other thoughts came to the surface and other parts of the consciousness appeared like the thread that since that

first meeting in 1994 guided my life. The teaching of devotion and humility of the disciple by which each and every duty can and should be done – not to receive gratitude, but for the sake of service itself. And, in the river of memories, the umpteenth teaching: Swami Niranjanananda in Rikhia who receives the respect of famous personalities, yet he bends down to arrange the carpet so that nobody would stumble. More than the teachings on the philosophy and practice of tantra and yoga, what continues to hit me is his capacity to be serious, profound and at the same time light: to work hard without letting our work become heavy for us and the people around us.

Meeting Swami Niranjanananda

Sn. Mridulananda

The first time I met Swami Niranjanananda, in 1986, I didn't know who he was, but I was struck by the way he related to me, by his simplicity, sensitivity and kindness. It was a brief exchange, a few words, just "Go on to the roof and look at the stars." But said with a smile, and with glowing eyes.

Two years later, in 1988, I came back to the ashram. There was a sense of discomfort and disorientation, since Swami Satyananda had left the ashram and started his journey of kshetra sannyasa – when he turned away from institutions and began a pilgrimage through the siddha tirthas of India as an itinerant sadhu.

After a few days, Swami Niranjan wanted to meet us to talk about Paramahamsaji, and the role which he had been entrusted with. What I appreciated most about his words was his humility. He said to us, "I am

not Swami Satyananda, and I do not have the qualities that permit Swamiji to manage problems at such a high level; therefore, things will change."

I felt that Swami Niranjan was burdened by the great responsibility of this task, but at the same time, he always maintained the attitude of a disciple who follows his guru's teachings.

My rapport with Swami Niranjan has grown very slowly, because for me, the rapport with my guru is not a mental thing, but has much more to do with feeling and intuition, beyond space and time. Many people

have said to me that for them, Niranjanananda and Satyananda are the same, but for me, it has never been that way. Not because I'm trying to be contrary to others, but simply because I consider Swami Niranjan as a guru who chose with great humility to be a disciple. And this is the greatest teaching that I have received from him. Considering his youth, he could have chosen to seduce with power, but instead, like a tireless disciple, he has continued to work every day to spread the teachings of yoga, and to help with the evolution of humanity. I perceive Paramahansa Niranjanananda to be in





complete and profound harmony with Paramahansa Satyananda.

Together, the two of them are the light that has illuminated my path for all these years. Thank you.

My spiritual family

Swami Shivaroopo Saraswati

When Swami Niranjan came to Italy in 1994, I had already met him in India ten years earlier at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger where I stayed for a month. At that time he was a tall, gentle and playful twenty-four year old swami. I knew he had been nominated as the successor of Swami Satyananda and President of BSY, so at the beginning I was somewhat scared of him.

Sometimes I would accidentally meet him in the offices or the corridors, and try to slip away from him like a shadow. This always made him laugh. Moreover, at the time I couldn't speak English at all, and this would end up in a funny kind of nonverbal communication. On one occasion I even found myself running after him in the garden to obtain some candies he was pretending to give me, but never doing it and then hiding somewhere laughing at my embarrassment.

I often saw him walking with Swami Satyananda when they were coming to teach us karma yoga in the gardens, sometimes with a hoe, or I saw him in the evening while he was leading the kirtans, and those were the times when you could feel the energy building up very strongly. On one of those evenings I heard him sing for the first time the bhajan, *Gurudeva Daya Karke*.





When I was about to leave, he came to say goodbye and told me not to go. This is for me a painful memory, as I liked staying in the ashram. I had become used to the climate, the pace, the gardens; I was also enthusiastic because of the yoga courses and the sympathy of the swamis who stayed there and were really hospitable to the people coming from all over the world. But I had to go, and ten more years passed before I could see him again. It had been ten years in which Satyananda Yoga had been spread around the whole world and Swami Niranjan had founded the Yoga University. I was hearing rumours about his severity, and I started complaining about a possible change in his personality.

On the inauguration day of the program in Italy, he presented yoga as Swami Satyananda had done before him, as 'the gift of peace to humankind'. He explained that to obtain peace we needed to become aware of the importance of introspection with the practices of yoga and of the discipline necessary to introduce them in our life. He talked about hatha and raja yoga, and ended with defining samadhi as total harmony and union with the inner self. After the ceremony, I went to see him and gave a little gift. Swami Anandananda came close and said to him, "Swami Niranjan, this is Shivaroop." At that moment, he really looked at me. In an instant I understood what he had become and I felt as if the sun itself had turned to watch me. I was thrilled by that and went away moved because I saw in him the figure of Swami Satyananda himself. In that moment I understood the poem Paramahamsaji had written for him, *Beloved Niranjan*. Every feeling of worry or abandonment I felt when the guru had left Munger in 1988 dissolved in the joy of finding in Swami Niranjan my spiritual family.

At the end of the seminar he invited me to India, where I subsequently went, and where I met Paramahamsaji in great shape, as he had already established Rikhia as his tapobhoomi. I was also seeing how Sivananda Math was growing and the perfection of Swami Niranjan as a disciple. It was really beautiful, the event of Sita Kalyanam . . . I even dressed in a sari, and Swami Niranjan was adorable.

I met him again when he came to Italy in 2006 for the Yoga Festival in Venice. They were three days of joy, love and harmony during which he taught us to lead a yogic life, improving our personalities, following the principles of yoga. He recommended us a daily sadhana he defined as the 'yoga capsules', and I know for sure many of us are still 'taking' them every day.

On the last day we participated with him in the havan, the sacred fire ceremony with Vedic and Mahamrityunjaya mantras, at the Lido beach.

He gave us the pleasure of having lunch with us in Trieste before going to Slovenia, and when he saw I didn't have a seat, he told me to sit next to him. We even sang a song in our dialect to him, and he looked up to the sea as I always dreamt to see him do while I was missing him and had gone to the seaside to speak to him with my heart telling him to come here, without ever having hope of his coming. But he came. I believe the power of love can do everything and I believe that the love between guru and disciple is huge.

Now that Paramahamsaji, after his Mahasamadhi, lives deep in my heart, I am grateful to him because he gave me so much, and because he gave me Swami Niranjan.



No more doubts

Sn. Dayaswarupa

Swami Niranjan, Oh what amrit, what a joy to have met you . . . when I think I was not interested in meeting you at the beginning.

I was Swami Satyananda's disciple and that was enough for me. But then I had the possibility of meeting Swami Niranjan when he came to Italy in 1994 for some programs in Turin, Rimini and the ashram in Montescudo. At that point I was so curious that I started scanning him, I was listening to what he was saying, observing what he was doing. He was emanating that same energy, he was saying the same things and, most of all, his love for his guru was above everything; he was a perfect disciple. Since then I had no more doubts.

The proof was before my eyes, especially during the programs in Rikhiapeeth where it was a blessing to see him with Paramahamsaji. Everything was so beautiful, a total union was in front of my eyes, the best father with his best son. There was also friendship, joy, grace, and a great sense of humour. Swami Niranjanananda is truly a successor; he will carry on the mandate of yoga and his tradition most ably.

I want to thank him for everything he has given me and for how he made me feel – the feeling of being loved and accepted is the best thing I have ever felt in my life.

I will thank you forever.



Being with Swami Niranjana, a lesson in discipleship

Swamis Uttarkashi and Anusandhana Saraswati

Just knowing and being with Swami Niranjana has in itself represented a great inspiration in our lives and many transformations have taken place in our 'head, heart and hands' simply because of the beautiful contact we have with him.

After the excitement of meeting one's guru and of receiving initiation and instructions from him, it can be bewildering to look around and see that one's life still seems the same, one's reactions are still the same, and at critical moments it may even become hard to know exactly what to do, how to act, what to expect and especially in what way it would be best to carry out the practices and the duties that have been indicated by the guru himself. This means: "How can one become a better disciple? How to bring all the beauty and strength of the guru's indications into one's day to day life and spread them to others? How to realize the peace and harmony which one has heard about and which one desires, and especially how to realize all this both inside one's own deepest self as well as in relation to outer surroundings – with family, friends, neighbours, in difficult circumstances and conditions as well as in good ones? How to deepen the understanding of yoga and what approach to have towards the people who are searching for the experiences that yoga offers through its practice?" During the journey to find the answers, Swami Niranjana has been a true beacon for us, a precious gift from our guru, Swami Satyananda.



The indications he has given to us have often included terms such as: 'humility', 'wisdom', 'common sense', 'understanding', 'compassion', 'sympathy', 'put yourself in the other person's shoes' and especially, as per Paramahamsaji's words: 'become sattwic' and 'soften the pranas'. In regard to how to teach yoga and meditation he underlined the need to regard it as a practice for our good as well as the pupils', and to understand the deep needs of the people who come to learn.

On the whole, he has represented the strong link with the spiritual and yogic tradition of Swami Sivananda through the strict following of the instructions and mandates of Swami Satyananda. He has also invited us to safeguard the continuation of this tradition which begins with Swami Sivananda, and is bound to continue, and not consider it as something which depends on only one person. This is also a reminder of the profound purpose of yoga, and its spiritual promise and goal. To realize this, indeed, takes time and wisdom!

To us, Swami Niranjan is a living example of how a disciple should go about creating and embodying the qualities necessary to move forward on the yogic and spiritual path, how to transform habits and automatic reactions to negative circumstances into positive qualities, how to learn a whole new way of looking at things. He has always encouraged us to carry out every instruction imparted by Paramahamsaji, even when we hesitated because we thought it was something impossible to realize. He would just say, "Well, have you tried? Try and you will see." And he was always right to make us do this!



The way he immediately carries out his duties to the guru is a lesson in humility and represents the embodiment of the deep love and dedication he has to his guru and his mission towards humanity. This quality of acting without hesitation according to the guru's wish also demonstrates the understanding of and inner unity with his guru's every thought and action. He knows what to do and how and when to do it in order to bring about harmony in every thought, in every word and in every deed. Thus the atmosphere around him and the energy field that is created for all of us becomes permeated with a feeling of harmony, of unity, of radiance which lifts us up in our spiritual search. He has so many rare qualities which can be the inspiration for all disciples or aspiring ones. And there is still so much we have to learn from Swami Niranjan!

Love and devotion

Swami Shaktidhara Saraswati

These are the first words that appear in my awareness when I think about Swami Niranjan; his looks, the expression of his face, what he says, what he communicates beyond words, his smile, the light and transference that his eyes emanate, they are all permeated by and vibrate with love and devotion.

When I see him it is as though no problems exist any more. My mind becomes relaxed, I feel I don't have to worry any more for he will fix everything up. To meet his smiling look is an opportunity to free the mind from unnecessary thoughts and gain a positive perspective for the day. Often, during difficult times, it is helpful to

keep the awareness absorbed in him for it gives a basis to work from.

His way of moving, of speaking, the tone of his voice, his attitude towards all of us and the many activities of the day makes me think of the totality of his love and devotion towards Paramahamsaji. He moves out of total understanding and awareness of his mission and the importance it will have for future generations.

Remembering the months during the Sannyasa Training Course in Munger, the nicest thing was to be able to have him so near and to play and joke with him with such simplicity, just like thoughtless children, to

perceive his joy in life and to laugh with him, feeling him partly as father, partly as brother, partly as friend. The perception I have is that of him embodying an ancient wisdom, as though he is a being who does not belong to this planet, and maybe this is why he can have such a humorous vision of life.

Personally I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity in my life to have met two such spiritual beings as Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjan. It is my wish to keep his love and devotion as a model, so that I can constantly follow the direction in which they point during this journey to the light.



2006

In 2006, Swami Niranjan came to Italy after twelve years. The occasion was the International Satyananda Yoga Festival held at Lido di Venezia from 19th to 21st May, in which over 700 delegates from 32 countries participated.

Swamiji, accompanied by Rishis Vivekananda and Hridayananda and Swami Sivamurti, arrived in Venice. The festival was held at the Palazzo dei Congressi at Lido di Venezia where, over the course of the three days, Swamiji delivered illuminating lectures on the theme of 'Living Yoga'. This was the occasion when he first gave the 'yoga capsules', a series of practices one could incorporate within the daily routine to stay attuned to the aims of yoga.

The event was a turning point in the life of many aspirants. As one of them put it, "Slowly, listening to him and entering that atmosphere of deep teachings, continuous inspiration, songs, flowers and playfulness, in those days, without our realizing it, the mind cleared and the capacity of perception sharpened. The heart felt lighter, the doubts faded away, and there was a deep feeling of happiness, a happiness that was also liberating."

Swamiji also conducted a memorable havan at the beach of Lido di Venezia. Over 350 aspirants received initiation into mantra, jignasu and karma sannyasa. During his stay, he also went on a gondola tour of the channels of Venice and visited the Murano Island.



Swan 2006

Venezia, 19th–21st May

Program: Satyananda Yoga Festival 2006

Lectures:

- The Four Dimensions of Yoga
- Gayatri Mantra and Mahamrityunjaya Mantra
- Head, Heart and Hands: the Three Aspects of Human Existence
- The Qualities of Mind and Heart
- Yoga Pills
- Karma Yoga
- Living Yoga

Diksha

Satsang

Other Programs:

- Havan at Lido
- Satsang at Mabapa
- Gondola Tour
- Tour of Murano Island



The Four Dimensions of Yoga

Venice, May 2006

Hari Om Tat Sat

I feel very happy to be here with all of you today and for many reasons. First, we are a small world of yoga in ourselves; thirty-three countries are represented here. Second, Venice is a beautiful city on water. It is also an historical city which has linked the East and the West, and this gathering is also a meeting of the East and the West. Third, we are going to discuss the subject of yoga, which is my subject. However, in order to understand yoga, one has to first understand life.

In the West, yoga is recognized as physical, mental or spiritual yoga. In physical yoga, there is a lot of stretching, twisting and bending. In psychological yoga, there are practices of concentration and meditation. In the spiritual dimension of yoga, there is cultivation of the positive qualities of life. This is how people in general have understood yoga till today. However, looking at the development and growth of yoga through the centuries, one comes to understand that yoga is experienced in four stages in the life of an individual.

The first stage of yoga is yoga practice. The second stage is yoga sadhana. The third stage is yogic lifestyle and the fourth stage is imbibing the yogic culture. If you look at yoga from this perspective you will

understand the relevance of yoga in life, not only in relation to our life today, but also the final outcome possible in the experience of evolution of human life. This understanding of yoga has been the teaching and vision of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, the two masters and luminaries of our tradition.

Yoga, life and tantra

Yoga has to be linked with our life; therefore, one must understand what life is. In order to understand life, let us use the example of infinite space and infinite time. In infinite space and infinite time, existence, or life as we know it, is a continuous flat line. In this flat line at times there is a spike. That spike represents us; it represents the life which we experience confined to a range in space and time. When that spike comes down, we again become part of the eternal space and eternal time. Thus, in the flat line of existence in eternal time and space we are only spikes. That is our life, our existence. The spike represents our time, our space and our perceptions of the world at a particular moment. This spike is our life, your life, their life, everyone's life.

It is in this life that we experience the development or destruction of human faculties and consciousness. In the past, thinkers have contemplated the role of life in the greater scheme of things just as today we think of our life in relation to society, our position and status. Just as we think about financial gains and losses, once upon a time people thought about their life in relation to the universe, cosmos and divine nature. They tried to discover the relationship of the individual with the universal experience and existence. And they came to the conclusion that the



human body and life is nothing but an expression of consciousness and energy, the body and the senses are only a medium through which the consciousness and energy express themselves. The way to awaken the forces and the qualities of consciousness and energy was devised into a system known as tantra.

The word tantra means the way to liberate the energy and expand the horizons of consciousness. The philosophy or the idea of the human being as an expression of consciousness and energy was developed in tantra. According to tantra, self-realization, God-realization or freedom is the outcome of an awakened consciousness and awakened energy. And the same consciousness and energy when confined by the mind and the senses become responsible for our physical existence.

Yoga came in as an offshoot or branch of tantra to direct one's energies, to understand and awaken the human consciousness, to understand and free the energy contained in this body. Thus, the foundations of yoga are in tantra and the purpose of yoga is to work with human consciousness to sublimate the restrictive and negative tendencies and also to awaken the energy field of the body which helps in the harmonization of human character. The main purpose or focus of yoga is to manage the levels of consciousness and energy that we are able to experience in our life. However, when, in the mid-fifties, yoga came out to society from its habitat in the Himalayas, it came out as a physical practice with greater focus on the body and the different states the body can achieve through the performance and practices of asanas.

In the beginning, yoga was used for maintenance of the physical body, for trimming the body, losing

weight, getting into shape. Later, with the new discoveries about the different practices, yoga became a way of stress management. Thereafter, it became a way to internalize the consciousness and awaken the dormant faculties. Everyone thought they could become realized with the practice of yoga within a very short time, forgetting one thing: that evolution takes its own time. A child who is born today takes many years to grow up, a seed that is planted today takes many years to grow into a big tree. Therefore, how can a few practices of meditation which you decide on give you enlightenment in one week, one month or one year? Nevertheless, people did become overnight prophets through yoga with their eyes on profit. Today, yoga is seen as an alternative lifestyle to manage the negative influences of our lifestyle.

Now, let us look at the four different dimensions of yoga: yoga practice, yoga sadhana, yoga lifestyle and yoga culture.

Yoga practice

When you come to practise yoga out of your own need, for example, you may have a back problem and you want to help yourself with yoga postures, you use yoga for a particular need. That's fine. You might want to use yoga to manage your stress and anxiety levels, so you may want to dabble in certain practices of meditation. You choose either this practice or that and when you find that you have attained the result or the result seems too far, you drop the practice. Sometime later, inspired by somebody, some idea or some thought, you start again. Then you stop again and go on a sabbatical for a few months. This on and off dabbling in yoga and using yoga for a personal purpose, is what I define as yoga practice.

At this stage, yoga remains as yoga practice; you do not go beyond the level of personal need. Ninety percent of yoga practitioners fall in this category. They practise yoga because they feel their body needs it, because it makes them feel light and energetic, or because they want to deal with their stress and anxiety. The purpose is mundane and gross.

Yoga sadhana

If this is the situation with yoga practice, then what is yoga sadhana? Yoga has defined certain aims for itself. The first aim of yoga is harmony through discipline. That is the first sutra of Patanjali. *Atha yoga anushasanam* – discovering the harmonious nature of the being through discipline. That is the first purpose of yoga.

The second aim of yoga is mind management, managing the dissipated states of mind – *Chitta vritti nirodhah*.

The third aim of yoga is to develop the awareness to such an extent that you can become the observer of your actions – *Tada drashtuh swaroope avasthanam*.

The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali define these three main aims of yoga in the first three opening statements. When you practise yoga to discipline yourself so that harmony can be experienced, or when you practise yoga to manage the modifications of the mind, or when you practise yoga to cultivate the awareness to such an extent that you become the observer of yourself, then such practice of yoga is called yoga sadhana. *Sadhana* means attaining perfection through constant effort. Attainment of personal discipline, management of the mind and cultivation of the consciousness are the three defined aims of raja yoga which constitute sadhana.



Very few come to this point of practice because most people don't actually want to discipline themselves, for they believe it involves too many restrictions. From the yogic perspective, discipline does not involve restriction; rather, it is the fine-tuning of the personal radio in order to get a clear signal. When you turn on a radio and it is not tuned to a station, all it gives is static noise. The same happens in a television. Imagine if all the channels were appearing together on a TV screen, which one would you look at? You can't look at any because all are superimposing their images on each other. However, when the tuning is right, only one channel will appear and there will be clarity of image and sound.

Just as fine-tuning is necessary to define the frequency of each channel, personal tuning is necessary to define the frequency of each expression of consciousness, mind and energy. That is the concept of discipline: we tune ourselves to the right frequencies in relation to our thoughts, desires, expectations, needs, strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, fine-tuning of this personal receiver is the aim of discipline in yoga. Discipline does not mean restriction in Sanskrit because the word that is used, *anushasanam*, means 'governing the subtle nature of human personality'. And fine-tuning of the personality happens when you are able to follow the progressions in yoga in a systematic way.

When Swami Sivananda taught yoga to his disciples about fifty years ago, he said that there has to be a blend of different techniques in one's yoga practice. In one yoga session, one should practise five items of yoga: one practice of yama, one practice of niyama, asana, pranayama and one practice of concentration.



He laid down these guidelines. And even today, in the ashram environment we follow these guidelines of practising asana, pranayama, concentration and one yama and one niyama in a yoga session. He used to say that in order to fine-tune the personality you have to practise yoga to access all the different areas of expression. Sensorial distractions and disturbances and imbalances have to be rectified with the practice of pranayama. Dissipated mental energies have to be channelled with the practice of concentration. To create a change in the behaviour pattern and attitudes of the mind, you have to adopt and live one yama and one niyama. When this practice is done in the right combination, one attains physical and psychological harmony, and the personality is fine-tuned. Thus, the first attempt in yoga sadhana is to attain discipline or control over the subtle processes of the personality.

When we follow the aims set out in yoga, then our yoga practice becomes yoga sadhana. It is the consistent, continued effort to attain the goal set by yoga. Among those who practise yoga, maybe only five percent practise yoga sadhana because it involves intense work and constant observation of oneself.

Yogic lifestyle

The third category is where yoga becomes a lifestyle. About three percent of yoga practitioners fall in this category.

What is yogic lifestyle? It is where you begin to express the attainments of yoga in your life, when you begin to live the principles of yoga and apply the techniques of yoga to manage your day to day situations. At that time, yoga is no longer a practice which you do for a

specific period in the morning, afternoon or evening; it becomes a natural expression of life.

Once we had a children's camp at the ashram. One day we practised pranayama and I told the kids: "Whenever you are in any danger, just hold your breath and the danger will go away." A few days later some of the children had gone to play in a water tank and a five-year-old fell down in the water. I happened to be nearby so I jumped in and pulled him out. When he came out he was smiling. I looked at him and didn't have the heart to be angry because he was smiling, so I said: "What did you do down there?" He said, "I was holding my breath." A simple statement, but that made me think that if one little boy can understand an instruction and use that understanding in a difficult situation like being drowned, that yogic understanding will become a part of his life in the course of time.

Let us look at an example of stress. When stress accumulates in life, it begins to affect the mind and the human behaviour. Sometimes it will come in the form of sleeplessness, sometimes it will manifest in the form of hypertension. Whatever its form, how do you deal with it? It is easy to pop a pill and go about your normal business. If there is hypertension, have a pill; if there is insomnia, have a pill. This is what people would generally tend to do. However, if you had yoga in your life you may manage your stress with bhramari pranayama and not require medication to manage the outcome of stress.

What would be the scenario for a person who is using yoga to manage stress? Maybe at work that person will go to the bathroom, close the door, sit down and practise bhramari ten times and then

come out to work. Or maybe he will come home in the evening and instead of sitting down with a glass of beer or wine, practise ten minutes of yoga nidra. Thus, one may use yoga at different times of the day to manage the conditions and states of the body and mind. In this way, one will avoid many physiological and psychological illnesses and stresses which come up in life.

When yoga becomes a lifestyle, it is not something that you practise one hour in the morning Wednesdays and Fridays with your yoga teacher in your yoga centre. You use yoga every hour to manage the different conditions that you are confronting. While travelling by car deep abdominal breathing can be practised, pranayama can be practised in the office bathroom. Yoga nidra can be practised during the afternoon or evening just to release the accumulated stress. Five minutes of breath awareness can be practised in the office to clear the mind of confusions and problems and have clarity. In this manner, yoga becomes part of the natural behaviour of life. That is known as yogic lifestyle. It is where we begin to apply and use yoga in daily routines and activities.

Yogic culture

As you become more fluent in the use of yoga in the normal routines of daily life, your mind, behaviour and attitude reflect the yogic awareness. That reflection of yogic awareness is known as yogic culture. About two percent of yoga practitioners achieve this.

So, this is how the role of yoga can be perceived in our life, as practice, sadhana, lifestyle and culture. Ultimately, we have to nourish our own personality and nature, and once we are able to recognize this



role of yoga in our life, we can actually appreciate yoga.

Achieving the first level

Yoga practice is the first stage, and what can be practised at this stage? Hatha yoga can be practised, parts of raja yoga can be practised. A consolidated practice of hatha yoga and raja yoga together complete the first level.

In the West, hatha yoga is generally considered the physical yoga and raja yoga is considered part of the mental yoga. However, hatha yoga is not physical and raja yoga is not mental. They are practices which bring about a change in the normal behaviour of the body, in the normal conditioning of energy, muscles and organs of the body.

Hatha yoga is the yoga of balancing the solar and lunar forces in the body. The solar force is known as prana shakti and the lunar energy is known as chitta shakti. Prana shakti is responsible for the movement of the body, the sense organs and the senses. Chitta shakti is responsible for the functioning of the mind and all the different mental faculties. Management of these two is the purpose of hatha yoga. Therefore, in traditional hatha yoga, the main practices were of purification and cleansing. These cleansing techniques of hatha yoga detoxify the body from the mouth to the anus. They activate the flow of prana shakti through the channels in the body, awaken different psychic centres or chakras of the body and stimulate the production of hormones. This is the range of hatha yoga. The combination of physical postures, cleansing techniques and chakra activation techniques constitute hatha yoga.

Raja yoga is management of the subtle influences or subtle mental behaviours. It comprises four major steps. Of course the raja yoga of Patanjali is called ashtanga yoga, which means yoga of eight limbs. These eight limbs actually control the behaviour and expression of body, energy, mind, behaviour and attitude. Asana in raja yoga has been defined by Patanjali as a posture in which one is comfortable and steady. When you are sitting on a chair, is it an asana? You may be comfortable and steady, you may be sitting with your legs crossed, comfortable and steady like me, but is that an asana? Asana is that posture in which you are at ease with yourself, which means that the body has to come to the point of perfect ease and comfort with the practice of postures. Once the body comes to that point of ease and comfort, all the physical imbalances, stresses and tensions are gone. The ease and relaxation of the body is the symptom of a balanced physical body. Such perfect harmony of the body is the outcome of asana.

Another component of raja yoga is pranayama. It is the energy structure component; the ultimate goal of pranayama is to balance the energies. Thereafter, with pratyahara, dharana and dhyana the management of mind is achieved and there is a gradual sublimation of the mental awareness from gross to subtle to transcendental.

The two other components of Patanjali's raja yoga are yama and niyama. Our attitude is managed with *yamas*, or the proper code of conduct, and behaviour is modified with the practice of *niyamas*, or rules of personal discipline. Therefore, the basic practices of

hatha yoga and raja yoga develop the personality at all levels from the behavioural aspect to the mental aspect.

Creating the garden of life

Yoga is a very vast subject. Ultimately, the practices offer the hope for betterment of the self. It is not necessary to become a yogi, but it is important to connect with the qualities inherent in us. This is what will make us an awakened and realized human being. You have to put the effort into transforming the barren land of your life into a flowering garden.

Once, a man purchased a barren piece of land. When he bought the land there was nothing except stones, rocks and weeds there. He put in a lot of hard work and turned it into a beautiful garden and now many people would come to admire it. One day, a priest came and he was so happy at the sight that he exclaimed: "God's creation is wonderful! Look at this beautiful garden that God has created!" The man said, "Sorry, God did not create this, I've done it. You should have seen this piece of land when God owned it!"

In the same way, we can also try to convert our life into a beautiful garden of which we can be proud. This can be done with practice and the right application of wisdom and creativity through yoga. In the coming days we hope to equip ourselves with the right tools to bring this change in the plot of land on which we live.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Gayatri Mantra, Mahamrityunjaya Mantra

Venice, May 2006

Hari Om Tat Sat

Dr Rishi Vivekananda spoke to you about stress, stressors and intervention to manage them. What he was talking about was fixing a cracked glass. A glass cracks and there is one fine line, one fine crack running through the glass. How do you protect it now? You put Quick-fix and hope that the crack does not get worse, for once the glass cracks it is very difficult for it to come back to its original form. In the same way, when somebody has a heart attack, you can diagnose it even years later because the scar can be seen on the ECG. The same thing happens with stress. All the stressors create a change in the relaxed and normal state of the mind and personality. In daily life, our stress begins with the alarm clock. Alarm clocks are a good invention, but imagine when you are sleeping in a very deep state of relaxation, suddenly a jarring sound wakes you up; on the clean blackboard a white line sets your day first thing in the morning.

That agitation, the unconscious agitation, the unconscious discomfort is what remains with you throughout the day. At night, the waters of the lake have become absolutely still and in the morning a huge piece of rock is thrown in, and the entire water of the lake is disturbed. When you have come to

this point where the lake is absolutely disturbed, the mind and consciousness are disturbed, then of course you try to reduce the stressors in your life following the method that Dr Rishi Vivekananda described. However, in yoga there is another method by which despite mental anxieties and agitations we try to bring back the immunity to our mind, the wellness to our mind and to ourselves. This is the use of mantras.

The armour of mantras

There are two important mantras to manage the ill effects of stress and provide immunity from stress. The first mantra works on manipura chakra, increases the vitality, the vital force or prana shakti, and creates physical immunity to stressors in life. The second mantra relates to ajna chakra and stops the agitations of the mind, obsessive thinking and behaviour, and encourages the emergence of a clear and balanced





awareness, perception and consciousness. The second mantra shields the mind from the negative influences of stress. Thus, the first mantra shields the body and the second mantra shields the mind.

Paramahamsaji has given instructions that on waking up, the two mantras should be practised by everyone, every morning, eleven times each. The daily use of these two mantras will provide complete physical and psychological well-being. While we are here in this yoga festival, every morning, before coming here, practise these two mantras eleven times. Experiment with yourself for these few days and you will definitely see a qualitative change in your ability to deal with life's situations and stresses.

We are going to practise these two mantras eleven times now. The first mantra is the Mahamrityunjaya mantra and the second mantra is the Gayatri mantra. Mahamrityunjaya mantra for the well-being of the body, senses and personality, and Gayatri mantra for obtaining clarity of mind, getting rid of confusions and conflicts, and attainment of wisdom. Remember to repeat them every morning as instructed when you wake up, sitting in your bed or, if there are people beside you, in the bathroom. The chanting of these two mantras must be done first thing in the morning in order to create protection and develop immunity at physical and psychological levels. Not when the glass is scratched and cracked.

Effects of Mahamrityunjaya and Gayatri mantras

When the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is chanted, manipura chakra is activated. Manipura chakra is the solar plexus, the seat of prana shakti. Stress creates an imbalance in the manifestation and functions of pranic

energy, even the environment and the mood creates a change in the pranic structure, and loss of prana shakti from the body opens the doorway for illnesses and diseases. Thus, when we chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times every morning, the sound vibrations and the frequencies are activating the solar plexus, manipura chakra, and the weak pranic energy in different parts of the body is re-strengthened. Once the debilitated shakti is revitalized, then it works to release or relieve the imbalances, illnesses and diseases from the physiological structure. Therefore, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra has been recognized since time immemorial as the mantra of awakening the pranas, prana shakti, the life force, and attaining health. It's a healing mantra.

The second mantra, the Gayatri mantra, is associated with ajna chakra. Ajna chakra is the seat of wisdom and intuition. The chanting of the Gayatri mantra creates the frequency or the vibration which activates ajna chakra. All the problems of fear, aggression, anxiety and guilt that we were seeing on the mental screen can be managed with the activation of ajna chakra through the chanting of the Gayatri mantra. According to tradition, the Gayatri mantra has always been the mantra to open the doors of consciousness, knowledge, perception and wisdom. The psychological scars can be healed with the chanting of the Gayatri mantra.

These two mantras should become a part of the daily waking-up process of every person. Well-being is the birthright of everyone, and those things which give us physical and psychological well-being should be adopted to improve the quality of our life. After these two mantras have been practised in the

morning, go about your normal business. Remember, the secret for the success of these two mantras is that they are chanted first thing in the morning before the mind becomes extroverted and begins to associate itself with people, needs, desires and events of the day. These mantras will have no effect if you do them after an hour of waking up when all your frequencies are tuned to the outer stations. When you wake up in the morning, there are no distractions. If you chant the mantra at this time, the effect is tenfold and your investment in only five minutes of your early morning time.

Repairing the armour

The next practice is to be done at night. When you come back home after the day's work, you have to again de-stress yourself. Imagine that you are a warrior: in the morning you put on your body armour, then go and fight. In the evening when you come back, there are arrows and dents in the armour. So what do you do at night? You remove the armour, remove all the arrows, repair all the dents, prepare it for the next day, and then go to sleep.

How do you repair the armour at night, how do you remove the arrows and repair the dents when you come back from the battlefield of life, society, profession and even family? Another investment of five minutes is necessary. Lie down and analyze the events that have taken place during the day. In your mind, go through the events of the day in sequence from the morning till the time that you are lying down there to visualize your day. Look at the events that have occurred during the day and identify those events, situations, times, people or places where

you have encountered conflict, stress, aggression and fear. Just be an objective witness to all that has happened and gradually bring a very simple thought in your mind, without reacting to what has happened: "Is there a better way to deal with this situation if it happens again?" Yes, there is a better way to deal with those situations that cause you distress in life. You will discover that within a week of this practice, you will be able to direct your efforts to manage the stressful situations in a better way.

By observing and recognizing the stressors of the day, you eliminate them from becoming an unconscious seed which will sprout in the course of time; you will be able to observe your own responses and reactions and channel them in a newer direction. The repair of the armour will be done with analysis of the events of the day and recognizing that the arrow was shot by a certain person at a certain time because of a certain reason and that you responded and reacted in a particular manner. By this self-analysis, the next time you will be better prepared. In this way, the awareness develops of how to handle the stressful situations of life and release them. When stress can be managed easily, it does not become a memory. When stress becomes a memory, it goes very deep and to remove the intensity of the negativity contained in that stress becomes difficult.

Thus, there are two things you have to do. First thing in the morning, the chanting of the two mantras and last thing at night, analysis of the daily events. Try this at home, and if you try it for a week, you will notice the change, the benefits. If you adopt the practice, ultimately you will be the winner.

Hari Om Tat Sat





Head, Heart and Hands

Venice, May 2006

Hari Om Tat Sat

Very shortly you will be given a piece of cloth called 'angavastra'. It is being given to you on behalf of Paramahamsaji and it carries with it prayers for your peace and prosperity. You will make us very happy by wearing it with dignity and respect. When you come to this congress, this gathering, always wear it as a reminder of the goodwill of Paramahamsaji towards you.

Today I want to discuss an aspect of yoga which very few people understand, yet everyone is keen to know about. Imagine that there are two electrical sockets and one plug. The plug represents your life which is connected to one of the sockets – the socket of the world of senses, objects and materialism. The other socket represents spiritual life.

When you want to plug your life into the spiritual socket, what do you do? You have to pull the plug out of the material socket and put it in the other one. That is yoga. We are so engrossed and involved in the world of senses, desires and expectations that we cannot connect with our inner spiritual nature. Therefore, in the ancient times, yoga was seen as a method of renouncing the material and connecting with the spiritual. It is like disconnecting or pulling out the plug from the material socket – there is no connection at all, and then putting it in the spiritual socket to re-establish a connection, a different connection.

Yogis, gurus and masters are those people who have pulled their plug out from the material socket and put it in the spiritual socket. Ninety-nine point nine percent of people in the world are afraid to pull their plug from the material socket. While keeping their plug hooked on to the material socket they want to experience spiritual life. The problem is that if a road is running from North to South and you are travelling on it in one direction, in order to change the direction of your journey you have to turn around and go the other way. This is what we are unable to do; we continue our journey from North to South hoping we will encounter North in the South as well. That is where we fail in spiritual life.

The socket of attachment

What is the solution for the ninety-nine point nine percent of people who are connected to the material socket? A plug has three pins, which represent positive, negative and neutral. These three pins can be compared with the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. The three gunas of our life are connected with the plug of the world providing us with electricity, energy, motivation, ambition and power. It is this association with the world which is the cause of our happiness and frustrations, attainments and losses and the feelings associated with these attainments and losses.

When we are connected to this worldly socket, the material socket, all expressions of the senses and the mind are externalized. The senses associate with objects and the environment; the mind interacts with the senses, objects and the environment; the emotions interact with mental behaviours, the senses,

objects and the environment. There is a passage in the *Bhagavad Gita* which defines the sensorial association with the world of objects. It says that whenever you are beside an object, an association is spontaneously and naturally created. *Sangaat sanjaayate kamah* – "From association desire is born."

If you are sitting beside a nice person, you are automatically attracted to that person. You see a nice flower and you are attracted towards it. If the flower was not there the attraction would not be there. However, because of the close proximity, the senses associate with it and this creates a response, a personal and individual response of attraction, desire and wanting.

The proximity of the object gives birth to different expectations and desires. If the beautiful person is not beside you, then there is no association, attraction or desire. But once the desire comes up, it induces feelings which motivate you to acquire that pleasing object. If you acquire it you are all right, but if you don't and the craving continues, then aggressiveness sets in. You now work to acquire the object that has pleased you. However, sometimes our credit card does not support our desires, sometimes we overdraw. Although we have fulfilled a desire, we have overdrawn the money. Then another cycle of working to fill up the loss begins. As soon as the wallet is full again, some other desire comes up and we rush to acquire that.

Life is only a play. As children we have desires and we play with little things made of metal and plastic, little cars and dolls, little this and little that. When we become adults, we still play with the same things, but in a bigger form. As a child one plays with little cars and as an adult one plays with a bigger car. As a child one

plays with a little doll, as an adult with a bigger doll. We are playing all the time and the association with objects continues all the time right from our childhood to our adulthood and to our deathbed. When expectations or desires are not fulfilled, one moves into the grey area of the sensorial mind. That is where, in the absence or due to the non-fulfilment of a desire, depression or anxiety sets in. When depression or anxiety sets in, it further enforces the desire and the need to acquire it. At that point the desire becomes an obsession, a continuous chattering of the mind: I want to acquire that, I don't have it, what can I do to acquire it, I don't have it. The result is frustration.

At this point, the obsessive, compulsive behaviour is seen and this leads to the development of a deluded mentality. This deluded mentality is not based on reality, but on one's own expectations and ambitions. In the deluded state, clarity of mind does not exist, the component of wisdom is pushed aside and that strong emotion overpowers one's life. That emotion is related with the desire, with the expectation, with the ambition. This happens to all of us because we are all connected to the socket of the material world.

Yoga of head, heart and hands

How can we improve this quality or condition of life? Will the practice of asana help to manage it? No. Will the practice of pranayama help overcome this condition? No. What will help here is observation of the mind. Paramahamsaji has said many times that a human being is a composition of the qualities of the head, heart and hands. These are the three factors of existence. If you don't have a head, but only heart and hands, you will be unsuccessful. If you don't have a

heart, only head and hands, you will be unsuccessful. If you have hands, but no head and heart, you will be unsuccessful. For life to express itself in its totality, all three have to be activated. One mistake that the modern civilization has made is that they have put the head before the heart and hands, whereas in yoga it is advised that you look at all these three aspects with the same attitude, with the same intensity, with the same awareness.

How do we manage or cultivate the qualities of the head, heart and hands? I would even say at this point that yoga begins in one's life when you begin to work with the head, heart and hands. If you are working with the body – to loosen up, to limber up, to become more flexible, to stretch yourself, that's perfectly all right. You are influencing the physical conditions and you will feel lightness, vitality and energy with these practices. But you will not be able to access







the dimensions of the head, heart or hands with the practices of asana, pranayama or even hatha yoga. In order to deal with and access these, we have to use different systems of yoga.

Yogic understanding of the 'head'

The subject for this morning is the head. How do we deal with the head? By 'head' we mean the mind, not the brain, because in this context the brain has no relevance in yoga. There are two hemispheres of the brain, left and right. In the left hemisphere there is nothing right, and in the right hemisphere there is nothing left! So, as there is nothing right in the left and nothing left in the right, the brain is totally bypassed in yoga. We deal with the mind here.

The mind is dealt with through the processes and practices of concentration and meditation. Mind is not consciousness; mind is the external aspect, the interactive aspect of consciousness. When consciousness is interacting with the world of senses and sense objects, that is the mind. From the yogic perspective the mind is divided into four components.

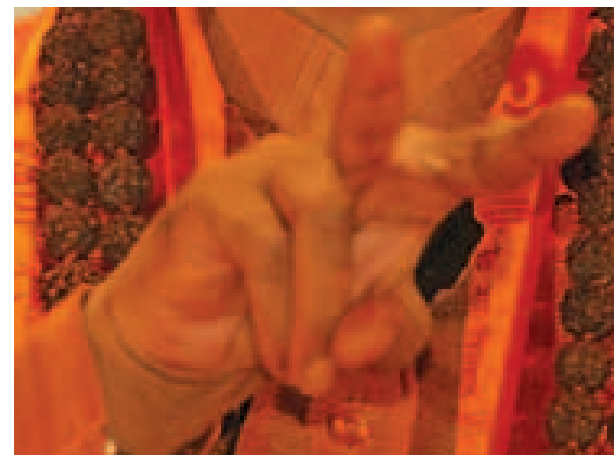
The first component of the mind is *manas*, the process of analysis, reflection, logical and linear thinking. The second component is *buddhi*, intellect, intelligence, the knowledge and understanding of right and wrong, and living according to intellectual concepts or ideas. The third is *chitta*, the subconscious and unconscious memories. The fourth is *ahamkara* or the ego principle, the identity of I-“I exist”, “I am”. Thus, the four components are manas, the reflective process; buddhi, the intellectual process; chitta, the memory process; and ahamkara, the ego identity. These four constitute the gross mind and

it is this mind which we utilize in our normal day to day environment – in our life, to succeed. It is in this mind that vrittis or different behaviours of the mind can be observed. Therefore, in the *Raja Yoga Sutra*s of Patanjali, the main focus is on mind management.

Systematic development of awareness

The principle or the philosophy that I have spoken about is seen in the process of raja yoga. The physical part – the asana component, is very tiny in raja yoga; it is one branch only. The part of pranayama is also very small; there is only one system of pranayama here. The third and the fourth limbs of raja yoga, yamas and niyamas, are also distinct and separate from the mental behaviours.

The entire mind unit is explored in the last four limbs: pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. So, if you look at the sequence of raja yoga, behaviour, personal discipline, postures and breathing represent only one limb each in the eight-fold path, while the systems of mind management cover four limbs. However, normally, people who meditate do not practise pratyahara or dharana. They try to jump straight into dhyana and they only end up in the realm of fantasy. Many people practise meditation with the purpose of seeing the light. I don't know why they go through so much trouble when they can simply turn on the switch and see the light! Those who try to have good experiences in meditation, who want to see the light, the blue pearl, the angels singing and trumpets blowing, don't understand that all this is nothing more than an expression of our mental delusions and fantasies. Meditation is definitely not that.



Many people practise meditation with the purpose of seeing the light. I don't know why they go through so much trouble when they can simply turn on the switch and see the light! The process of meditation, according to yoga, is a very systematic development of awareness in relation to the mind and mental behaviour.



The process of meditation, according to yoga, is a very systematic development of awareness in relation to the mind and mental behaviour. The first system in Patanjali's yoga is pratyahara for mind management. There are different ways of defining pratyahara, the fifth limb of raja yoga.

Unplugging from the material socket

When our plug of life is connected into the material socket, then the current flows from the socket to the plug to the machine – to this human personality. The current has already been flowing into the socket on the wall from the mains. The world has been there before you were born; the world will continue to be there after you are gone. The electricity will flow in the socket regardless of who plugs in, but this equipment is powered only when we connect the plug into the socket. When the current is flowing through the socket into this equipment of body-mind unit then, at that time, the world is feeding us. We receive our nourishment from the world, we receive our happiness and joy from the world, we experience noise and peace from the world. The world is feeding our senses, mind, intellect and ego.

So, what is pratyahara? When the world stops feeding you, that is known as pratyahara. Stopping the influences of the world affecting this body-mind unit is pratyahara. The definition of the word pratyahara is 'to stop the feeding of the senses by the material world'. Pratyahara is the first step into mind management.

There are different levels of sensitizing the human nature and mind to experience the relationship between one's self and the world. In the first level of pratyahara, awareness is to be cultivated. In the second



stage of pratyahara, stresses have to be removed and the individual should be relaxed. In the third stage of pratyahara, one has to know how much input can be received from the world and when to stop those inputs. In the fourth stage of pratyahara, one has to become aware of the natural expressions of the human

personality and nature. In order to become aware of the personal nature, you have to objectively see your strengths and weaknesses. You have to see the ambitions that govern your life and needs that are the requirement of your life. In this stage of pratyahara, there is analysis of strength, weakness, ambition and

need since these are the factors that create disturbed mental behaviours. In the fifth stage of pratyahara, there is connection with the pristine qualities of life. In the sixth stage of pratyahara, there is clearing and cleaning of the repressed and suppressed emotions, expectations, ambitions and samskaras.





Learning how to be still is the first lesson of pratyahara, not only stopping the movements of the body, but also extending the awareness to each and every part of the body, to each and every experience of the mind.

After this, dharana begins. *Dharana* means concentration. It is here that we are learning to focus the forces of the mind and prana. It is like tuning the guitar. If you pick up a guitar which has not been played for many days, you have to tighten all the cords and ensure that they are properly tuned. The tuning of cords is the focusing of mental energies and prana shakti. Prana and mind have to be in harmony with each other in order to experience dharana, concentration. When the mind and prana are balanced, in harmony and synchronicity with each other, then meditation or dhyana begins. Thua, raja yoga is the system of managing the qualities of the head.

Practices of pratyahara

We will look at the different practices of pratyahara in brief. The first practice of pratyahara is *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of body. The body is still only when the mind is still, and the mind is still only when the body is still. For how long can you sit still without moving? That will show you how relaxed and focused your mind is.

Many years ago, when I was living in Colombia, once I was travelling to a country in Central America. Mid-way, the plane landed in Panama due to an emergency. Every person in the plane was being checked. We were all brought down into the waiting room and the customs officers were checking the passports one by one and saying to each passenger, "You can go" or "You can't go".

We were all waiting. Due to my dress I was the last one to be checked, so I had plenty of time to observe all the others. Some people were so nervous that they were chain smoking. Some were on the phone trying to contact their families and friends. The whole environment was very tense and uncertain. I was sitting on my seat observing everyone. Many people would come up to me and ask: "Are you not nervous?" And I would answer: "What for? I haven't done anything wrong, I am not carrying any drugs, I never had a prison record." If I had had any of these things, then perhaps I might have been nervous, but there was no reason to be nervous. I noticed at that point how the agitation of the mind reflects on the body. There were people walking up and down continuously, they were so nervous they could not sit down. There were people who were smoking continuously. That was a realization for me: to see the link between the mental behaviour and the physical behaviour. Then I realized

why yoga says a peaceful mind creates a peaceful body and a peaceful body creates a peaceful mind. It was an example of physical and mental imbalance that I witnessed at that time. What was I doing while sitting there? Watching my breath, doing my mantra. As I had to sit for two hours, I decided to utilize my time in that manner, and there was no agitation, no nervousness, nothing. But if I did not have the yogic intervention, I believe I would have been in the same state as the others.

I gave you this example to illustrate the physical-mental link. In order to quieten the mind, Maharshi Patanjali says that the posture should be comfortable and steady. That is how he has defined asana: "A posture in which you are comfortable and steady for a length of time." It is a very clear indication that he is not advocating the stretch exercises for the feel-good factor; rather, he is using asana and pranayama to access the mind. The first practice to access the mind is *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of the body and stillness of the mind. An interesting experience of *kaya sthairyam* is that when you focus on the stillness of the body, you will encounter the state of silence in the mind.

Learning how to be still is the first lesson of pratyahara, not only stopping the movements of the body, but also extending the awareness to each and every part of the body, to each and every experience of the mind.

The second practice of pratyahara is *yoga nidra*, which all of you have practised at one time or the other. The practice of *yoga nidra* fulfils two purposes: first it connects you with your body, it connects you with the mental experiences and this connection with the body and mental experiences develops the





awareness of one's self. The second is relaxation, relaxation of the body-mind unit. We may think we are aware, but actually we are not. Many people have said to me after their first practice of yoga nidra: "For the first time I realized I had a body. For the first time in my life I actually visualized my right hand thumb, my first finger, my second finger, my third finger, my fourth finger, all the parts in one systematic order. For the first time in my life I became aware of the health of my toes." Many of you would also have discovered a new body when you started to practise yoga nidra. You may use the body, you may play games, run and sit, you may do everything, but there is no physical awareness, there is no physical consciousness. With this practice, the awareness extends from one point of perception into the whole body, it takes in the whole body. And the relaxation, the psychological relaxation, the unconscious and subconscious relaxation helps to release the blocks from the personality.

The third practice of pratyahara is ajapa japa, breath awareness and mantra combined with breath movement. Breath and mantra together becomes a very powerful tool of introversion. They help to block the sensory inputs into the body-mind unit.

The fourth practice is antar mouna, inner silence, in which we observe the behaviour of the mind. After this, pratyahara evolves into other practices as well. However, the first four practices are the most important ones to experience true pratyahara. After completing pratyahara, the state of concentration or dharana develops naturally. It is in pratyahara that the ego manifestations are managed because they are the first barriers in spiritual experience.

The ego and the elephant

In 1977 or '78 when Swami Anandananda first came to India, he was an inquisitive young Italian. He was fired up with the idea of enlightenment, so he went to Paramahamsaji and said, "I have come from Italy, I want to be realized." Paramahamsaji said, "Well, you might be from Italy, no problem, but realization is not possible." So Swami Anandananda said, "Are you saying that all your philosophy is useless? It is you who says it is possible to become self-realized with the practices of yoga and mantra." Paramahamsaji said that he was not wrong and the philosophy is right, but there has to be a proper progression, there can't be instant realization. Paramahamsaji told him that just as a seed planted today will give fruit ten years down the line and a child born today will learn to walk after three years, in the same manner, if you start your yoga today, maybe you will be realized by the time you are ready to leave the membership of the world. But you know how rash Italians are, they just want everything then and there!

Swami Anandananda insisted and bugged Paramahamsaji, so Paramahamsaji said all right, let us give it a try. He said, "I'm going to give you a mantra, go to your room and repeat your mantra, and don't come out of the room till you are able to see the divine spark in everything and every being." So, Swami Anandananda sat down in his room and started doing his mantra. A few days passed, a few weeks passed and a few months passed. One day the doors of his room opened and he came out glowing, radiant and said he had found it. He went to Paramahamsaji and said that the mantra was very effective. Paramahamsaji asked what had happened. He said that since he started

doing the mantra, everything became luminous. No matter what he did, what he looked at, he only saw the divine radiance in everything. He was seeing God in everyone, in every animal, in every person, in every vegetable. Paramahamsaji said: "Very good, in order to celebrate your enlightenment, go to the market, buy some spaghetti and we will have a nice dinner tonight." He gave some money and a bag to Swami Anandananda and sent him off.

Those of you who have been to Munger know that the market is about two kilometres from the ashram. So Swami Anandananda with his bags started to walk. When he arrived at the market, he noticed a mad rush, people were running everywhere. He stopped one man and asked what the problem was. The man said there was a mad elephant in the market who was breaking down everything and trampling people. Swami Anandananda thought it was time to test his spiritual power and his logic was simple: "I have God in me, the elephant has God in him; one God will recognize the other God and there won't be any violence." The only thing which he forgot was that the elephant had never received any mantra and was not illuminated like him.

So Swami Anandananda continued and the elephant came charging. Swami Anandananda was repeating his mantra while looking at the elephant, but the elephant was on a different wavelength altogether. He came, picked Swami Anandananda with his trunk, gave him three rounds of the world and put him down.

Back in the ashram, we were all waiting for him to return with spaghetti, cheese and tomato to make our dinner. Six hours later we saw him coming through the gates all plastered up, seething, red in the face, abusing

in Italian, which fortunately no one understood. Somehow he hobbled over to Paramahamsaji and threw the bag and the money down. Paramahamsaji asked him what had happened. He said, "What do you mean what happened, can't you see the state I am in!" Paramahamsaji asked him to calm down and tell the story from the beginning. So he started.

After he took the bag and the money, he was walking down the road looking at the creation of God, seeing God in everything – in a flea-ridden dog, on the leaves of the trees, in all the people around him. Engrossed in intense concentration of the divine nature, he approached the market. There he saw many Gods running, so he stopped one God and asked what was wrong, what was happening. That God told him about a mad elephant rampaging in the market and suggested not to enter the market. But since he thought he had attained illumination, gained special powers, he decided to confront the God in the elephant. And the result of the teaching was before us! Paramahamsaji simply said one thing to him: "When the man was warning you not to go into the market, that was God telling you not to go, why did you go? You ignored the warning of God and this is the result." Since then, Swami Anandananda has never been the same again and if you observe him, he still walks with a limp.

This is a story. If you wish to believe, it is real; if you don't wish to believe, it is only a story. But the message is real: "No matter how deep you go in meditation, into yourself, the ego always has the upper hand." It was due to the ego that he decided to confront the elephant and not heed the warning. That is applicable to all of us present here because in

our arrogance, expectation and desire, we become so caught up in our attainment that we miss the point that the ego has not been subdued.

Foundation of meditation

In the four components of the mind, manas can be balanced, buddhi can be reorganized and chitta can be visualized, but it is very difficult to tame ahamkara. And that is where meditation or any attempt to transform one's self internally fails. Any failure in spiritual life is always because of the ego, not because of the lack of one's efforts. Therefore, perfection in pratyahara is essential. It is the only stage where the tools to manage one's ego are given.

I've been involved with yoga for the last forty-five years and I've come across many people who say they have practised yoga for many years, have had wonderful and fantastic experiences, but when I see them working and functioning in their own environment with their family and friends, I can see they have not done anything. Despite twenty or thirty years of practising meditation, the ability to manage one's emotions or mind has not been attained. The responses are the same to anger, fear and insecurities. If the responses haven't changed, what is the benefit of spending thirty years in meditation? Nothing. It is for this reason that I say that meditation is something that no one has practised in the world till today, because nobody has followed the system of meditation. If you follow the system of meditation, then managing each component of the mind becomes possible.

Pratyahara is a very definite technique to remove the ill influences of the world from the mind. Pratyahara is a definite technique to cultivate inner strength,

positivity and optimism. For me, meditation means pratyahara. It does not mean dharana, it does not mean samadhi. Pratyahara is the foundation of the mind. If the foundation is strong, you can construct a beautiful strong building which will stand for many hundreds of years. If the foundation is not strong, no matter what kind of a building it is, it will come down one day.

Pratyahara provides the foundation for the mind to develop its own creativity. This mental creativity is seen in wisdom, and wisdom is appropriateness in life. Wisdom is auspicious and appropriate thinking, according to the situations and circumstances; it is appropriate and auspicious behaviour according to the situations and circumstances.

Thus, raja yoga in the area of mind management becomes the most valuable tool to develop the qualities of the head. The final point of today's discussion is that mental creativity has to be developed by disciplining the mind and regulating the behaviour of the mind. And that is the beginning of yoga, according to Patanjali.

Hari Om Tat Sat



The Qualities of Head and Heart

Venice, May 2006

Hari Om Tat Sat

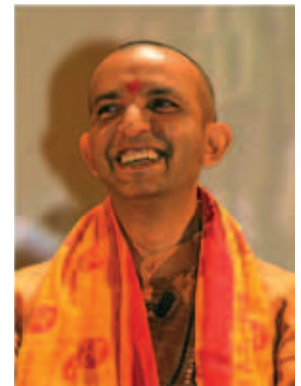
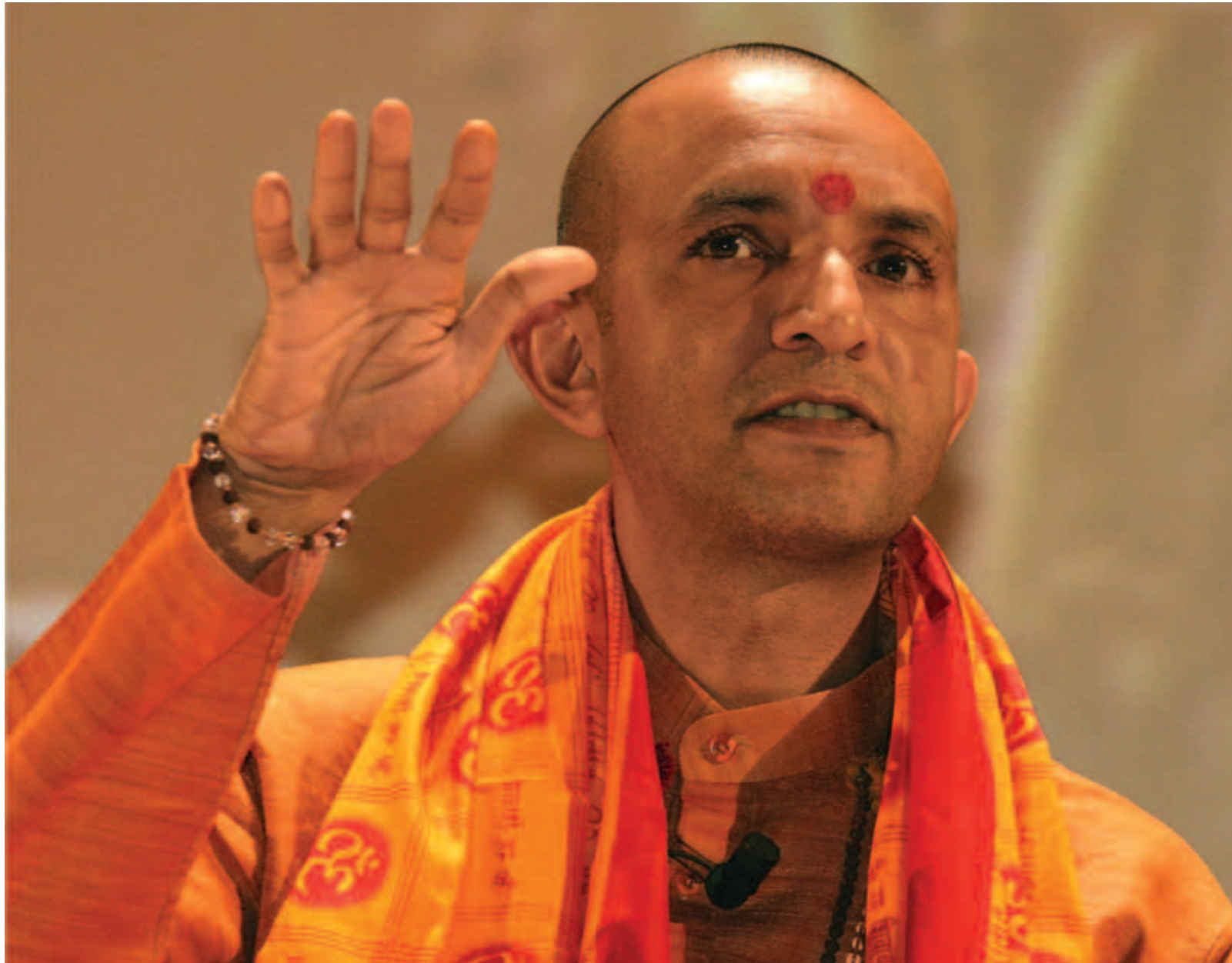
When we say the qualities of the head have to be developed, we are talking about the yogic methods of managing the mind. What this means is that the patterns of consciousness which are directed towards the external world have to be changed and directed inwards. Directing the consciousness inwards does not mean that you negate the external world; rather, it is treading in life with awareness. That is the inward journey of an individual. Therefore, we need to know what are the qualities of the mind that one needs to develop in order to come to this point.

Developing the qualities of the head

Willpower

The first quality of the mind that one needs to develop is willpower. It represents a focused mind and not a dissipated mind. Willpower is the first requirement of an individual on the yogic journey. Here, willpower does not mean assertiveness, but a quality of mind which achieves what it desires. This is the straight flight of the arrow. It is the state of mind in which there are no dissipations; the mental energies are brought together and focused. If you decide that every day you will wake up at a particular time, the mind will wake up sharp at that time. If you decide that from today you will leave one bad habit, from that moment onwards that bad habit has no place in your life, there is no thinking about it and no craving for it later on.





There are many people who make attempts to get rid of their addiction to smoking, alcohol or drugs. Although there is a desire to leave the habit, the hankering continues and there is a struggle between the habit and one's aspirations. Often in our life the mind and thoughts keep going back to what has been left behind and we desire it again; this is lack of willpower. Willpower represents a focused mind, a mind which is energized. That is the first attainment of mind management.

Concentration

The second goal is intensity of concentration. This leads to greater involvement with one's creativity. You may notice such intensity of concentration among software developers. When they are creating a program they sit down at seven pm and they are so involved and engrossed in what they are doing that when they look at the clock next, it is three in the morning. That kind of involved concentration is rare, but possible.

When you are involved in concentration and work, time has no meaning. When you gossip you forget the time too, but if you have to listen to somebody telling you what to do, even one minute will be like an hour. In one stage you are involved; in the other stage you are isolated. When we are isolated from our mind and environment, even a minute becomes an hour. When you are unified with the mind and environment, hours can seem like minutes. Such intense concentration is the second requirement to cultivate the faculties of the mind.

Wisdom

The third quality that we require is wisdom, and wisdom is applied knowledge. If one knows many

things, there is knowledge, but it may not be applied in life. You know what is right and what is wrong, but if you have to choose between the right and the wrong under compulsion, you will choose what you think is appropriate and that may not be the right thing. You may do the wrong thing knowing perfectly well that what you are doing is inappropriate.

We encounter many situations in our day to day life where we do the wrong thing knowingly. We realize and know that it is not right, but because of the abrasiveness of the human personality we ignore that feeling, that understanding, and later on feel guilty and confused about it. Later on, questions come up: "Why cannot I do the right thing? Why am I motivated in the wrong direction?" I am not talking of human follies; I am talking of what we can cultivate. So, wisdom has to be cultivated by putting into practice the knowledge that you have acquired. Applied knowledge is wisdom.

Dispassion

The fourth quality that has to be cultivated is dispassion. Dispassion is non-attachment. We get so easily attached to things. A small present that somebody gives us goes into our box and it remains there for ten years. A pen that somebody has given to us is kept in our desk for years. If somebody asks you for that pen, suddenly it will have an emotional value attached to it. You will say, "Oh, it was given to me by this fantastic person and I can't give it to you", although you have not used it for the last twenty years and it has been lying there in the drawer. Whenever you have to give up something in life, the emotional values make you hold on to it. That is possessiveness and that is attachment.

This morning you received a piece of cloth that was given to you with the sankalpa of peace and prosperity so that your life can be filled with the good wishes of Paramahamsaji, so that your life can be filled with peace and prosperity. When you received the cloth, there was a feeling for it and you put it on with that feeling. The cloth conveyed and carried the sankalpa and grace to you and your life, and you will continue to receive them for the duration of this yoga festival and hopefully beyond it too. Therefore, I asked you this morning to wear it with dignity and respect whenever you come for the program.

At present we are all tuning into that frequency of grace, peace, joy and plenty in life, but when this frequency changes and you go back to your regular, normal environment and open your letterboxes and find that it is full of bills, a shift in mind will take place and you will say to yourself: "Okay, yoga aside, now back to life." At that moment this cloth will have no meaning; you can fold it and keep it for twenty years. It will serve as a memory, a memento of an event that you have experienced in your life. If there is any attraction towards it, then maybe sometimes at night when you come back from your work you will take it out, look at it, put it on, walk around and then go to sleep. Twenty years later if somebody says, "It's beautiful, can I have it?" you will not give it because you will associate with the emotions that you put into it twenty years ago and attach an emotional value to it. That happens with everything in life.

In the course of life, we develop our attachments and associations, and they become the cause of conflict and confusion. Therefore, we have to cultivate *vairagya*, non-attachment, non-possessiveness. But how is that achieved?



Many years ago, when Paramahamsaji came to the ashram of Swami Sivananda, he was given a room. Paramahamsaji decided to take out every piece of furniture from the room and empty it completely. He said to himself, "If I am a sannyasin, why do I require all these things?" He took out the bed, put a dhoti on the floor to lie down on; took out the chair and desk and sat on the floor with his notebook and pens; put

out all the cups, plates, spoons, sugar, tea and stove. He started to live like that.

One day, Sivanandaji was inspecting the ashram and came to Paramahamsaji's room. He looked at this empty room and gave instructions to bring five chairs, two tables, five to ten cups and saucers, spoons, tea, sugar, stove and coffee. Paramahamsaji said to Swami Sivananda that there was no need of all those things,

but Swami Sivananda said, "They are not for you; they are for those who need them. Since you are an administrator of the ashram, many people come to see you and there might be people who need tea and coffee, who may need to sit on a chair, who may need other things. Therefore, keep them in your room."

Till today, Swami Satyananda has maintained that philosophy of life. He says: "I don't own anything; people give me things so that I can give them back to those who need them." That has been his philosophy of life, vairagya, as simple as that. Having things but not being attached to them or having any craving for them is vairagya. Non-attachment and non-possessiveness was the teaching given by Swami Sivananda in a very simple sentence: "Keep them; they are not for you, they are for those who need them when they come to you." If you think on this sentence, it opens up a vast vista of the concept of vairagya. It is this vairagya, dispassion or non-attachment that has to be cultivated as a quality of mind.

The mind is related to linear, logical and analytical thinking. The mind identifies with intelligence. The intelligence, the logical, linear and rational component of life is known as the mind. With wisdom, with non-attachment or dispassion, with greater involved concentration, the creative nature of the mind develops, and then we move into another dimension, the dimension of the heart.

Developing the qualities of the heart

The seat of God-realization

Heart is a dimension or an area that is much misunderstood in our society. The modern civilization has encouraged the development of the qualities



The final outcome of bhakti yoga is not seeing the duality, distinction or division between people. With bhakti yoga, one is endowed with friendship, compassion and forgiveness, one transcends the ego expressions and is equipoised in pain and pleasure. These are the qualities that arise from bhakti.

and faculties of the head, and emotions are believed to be the weakness of life. This belief is reflected in statements like “Boys don’t cry” or “Grown-ups don’t cry.” Right from the beginning of life, the emotions or the heart qualities are repressed, suppressed and not allowed to manifest spontaneously. People have lost the connection or contact with the heart qualities. We look at ourselves and our successes in life as achievements of the IQ.

When we identify with the head for a long time, there is the awareness of a vacuum in our life. There is absence of that which nourishes, supports and protects our life. In other words, it is the absence of God from our life. The Upanishads and the Vedas have proclaimed that God lives in the heart. If God lived in the head, it would be possible to acquire, experience or attain Him through meditation and samadhi. However, even those who attain samadhi don’t realize God. In a book written about six thousand years ago by Sage Narada, there is a story where Narada is asking God where He lives, and God answers, “I do not live in heaven, nor do I live with the yogis; I live in the hearts of those who remember me.” Even the Vedas and Upanishads have proclaimed that the experience of God is possible when the heart is awakened. Therefore, the seat of God-realization is the heart, not the head.

Purpose of yoga of the heart

Yoga has a very specific purpose and reason to cultivate the qualities of the heart. It is not to experience love, not to experience sympathy, compassion and goodness, but to manage the emotions so they can help transform our life. Just as the intellect is the

outcome of the mind function, emotion is the outcome of the heart function. Do you know the meaning of emotion?

‘Energy in motion’ is e-motion. Energy in motion means subtle movement of the vital forces. These energies begin to move when we come in contact with an object. When you see a bag of money lying on the floor and nobody around to claim it, what feeling will develop in you? The feeling of greed. Greed is an emotion and it came up attaching itself to an object. When you have your children with you, what do you feel towards them? Affection. That affection is an emotion. When you confront your adversary, what do you feel? Animosity, hatred. That is an emotion. Anger is an emotion, fear is an emotion. When these emotions come up, there is no voluntary control over their manifestation.

The heart is like a crystal ball. You place the crystal ball on a red cloth and you will see the red colour reflected in it, but that does not mean that the ball is red. You place the crystal ball on a green cloth and the green colour will be reflected in it, but that does not mean that the ball is green. All the different colours can be seen in a crystal ball depending on the proximity of the colour with the crystal ball. In the same manner, emotions are evoked when they are in close proximity to an object or idea. They are energies which begin to move and over which there is no voluntary control. We do not understand these emotions, but we identify certain feelings that we enjoy and like and which we think will fulfil us. There are certain emotions that have come to be accepted universally as good, such as love, compassion, sympathy, friendship and so on, and we aspire to acquire them, but how?

The mind is too conditioned. The conditioning of the mind directs the vision and desires to that which is physical and gross. Therefore, even when we search for love, we search for it outside and believe that the other person can fulfil our requirement of love. However, the other person is also an imperfect person; the other person is also looking for someone to receive love from. So, while person A is expecting love from person B, B is expecting love from A. Both of them have their own ambitions, aspirations and limitations, and both are trying to draw energy from each other without giving it back. Therefore, love becomes sensorial love, it becomes sensual love; it becomes a conditioned idea, “I need love.” But you don’t know what love is. When there is search for love, there is a ‘fall’ in love. There is no rising in love. People say “I fell in love”; I have never heard anyone say “I have risen in love”, which means that love has always been a failure in life. This may sound like a joke, but it is true.

We look for the heart qualities outside, we look for sympathy outside, we look for compassion outside, we look for love outside, we look for friendship outside, we look for recognition outside, we look for moments of joy, temporary moments of joy to stimulate our life, and we search for happiness and love. Yoga, however, has a different perspective on developing the qualities of the heart. The yoga to develop the heart is bhakti yoga.

Understanding the nine limbs of bhakti yoga

Bhakti yoga has been a very misunderstood yoga. It is often considered the yoga of devotion. It is considered a yoga in which you become God-oriented. Due to

this, bhakti yoga has also been treated as a part of religious behaviour. These are all wrong ideas of bhakti because bhakti yoga is a subject as deep and intense as raja yoga. In raja yoga there are eight limbs, but in bhakti yoga there are nine limbs. It is *navanga yoga*, nine-limbed yoga, not *ashtanga yoga* or eight-limbed yoga. It is an entire process of gradually working with the human nature – transforming it, cultivating it and flowering it.

The first limb of bhakti yoga relates to associations. What kind of people one should associate with and what kind one should avoid being with. You aspire to be with friends and avoid being with adversaries, but bhakti yoga has gone one step further in defining what kind of a friend you should associate with – a saintly friend, not a sinner friend. Friends can be saintly and sinful, both. There are friends who can encourage you to walk the proper path and there are friends who can encourage you to walk the wrong path. So, one has to have the association of saintly friends, not sinful friends.

There is a beautiful passage in the *Ramayana* explaining what kind of a friend one should associate with: “The one who takes your heart when he goes away from you.” Upon separation, your friend takes away your heart with him. It’s a poetic description, of course, but this association has to be observed because its outcome is the unmasking of your face.

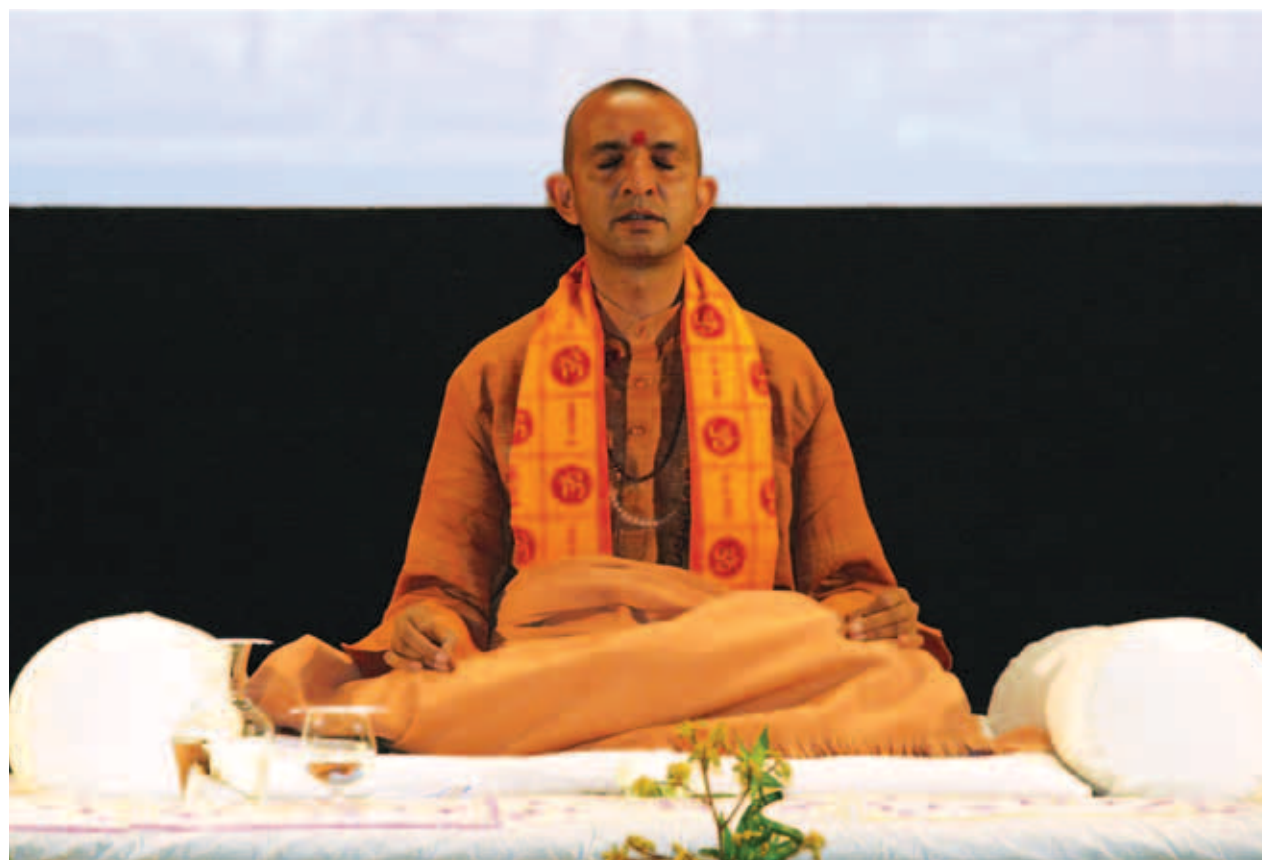
Thus, the first step of bhakti yoga is pious association. It is this piousness in life which will give you a different perspective and support for your aspirations. There will be help and guidance to achieve your aspirations. The positive and the qualitative nature will develop with the right association and an optimistic outlook

will be retained for life. Through discussions it will be possible to clear many confusions and doubts.

The second component of bhakti yoga is to understand the right thing. Understanding the right thing is cultivating the appropriate relationship with nature and with the divine.

The third form of bhakti is to become egoless, to be free from the influences of the ego while performing any action and during interaction with other people. It is cultivation of humility in life.

In this way, all the nine systems of bhakti yoga help you in one dimension of the heart expression. When one follows the system of bhakti yoga, one becomes truthful to oneself. In our life, all the time, every day, every moment we put on different masks. We are different people when we meet our friends; we are different people when we meet our clients, our students, our peers. We change our hats so many times during the day that we don’t even know which is our real nature.





We put on the mask of falseness, the mask of arrogance, the mask of strength although we are weak, the mask of being strong although we may be breaking from inside. We like to project ourselves in a way that is appreciated by people. The whole drive in life is appreciation, recognition, friendship and love. This is what society has given to each of us and that's what we look for in society. We look for friendship, recognition and love in our society.

For love, we find ourselves a husband or wife, for friendship we develop a circle of equals and peers, and for recognition we try to excel in what we do. Therefore, recognition is from work, love is from home and friendship is from society. These are the three things people are craving all their life. However, this search is outside and we are projecting ourselves outside; we are putting on different masks, we are presenting a different self each time, to each person, to each group.

Outcome of bhakti yoga

When the ambitions do not dictate the affairs of one's life, when personal greed and needs do not dictate the actions of one's life, then the emotional transformation which we experience through bhakti yoga changes the entire life, it transforms the entire consciousness. The outcome of bhakti yoga, the perfection in the nine stages of bhakti yoga, has been described by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The final outcome of bhakti yoga is not seeing the duality, distinction or division between people. With bhakti yoga, one is endowed with friendship, compassion and forgiveness, transcends the ego expressions and is equipoised in pain and pleasure.

These are the qualities that arise from bhakti. Sri Krishna describes the outcome or the result of having perfected bhakti in life in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

We have not even started to practise and attain the first experience of bhakti yoga, because we have always used bhakti as a method of coming closer to what we believe to be divinity. Bhakti yoga is confused with religious rituals, prayers and chanting. Bhakti is not all that; it is a process of inner psychological change and transformation. The heart is as complex as the mind, if not more!

Redirecting emotions

When I say the word heart, I don't mean the physical heart. Just as you understand mind as a broader concept, you have to understand the use of the word 'heart' in the broader context. The heart is where our energies manifest. This energy becomes the aura; it becomes the electromagnetic field around the physical body. When you are angry, the aura is red; when you are depressed, the aura is grey; when you are sick, the aura is yellow; when you are healthy, the aura is green. All these different colours of the aura reflect the energy which is generated in the heart centre in the anahata chakra.

Different moods and emotions are evoked in the process of the day, and most of the time these emotions or energies in motion are being directed outwards. In meditation, when you are able to direct the same emotions inwards to find their balance and harmony, then that meditation becomes bhakti yoga. In the diversion of the natural flow of emotions, when they are diverted backwards – inwards, there has to

be a point of focus for them. In the external world there are plenty of things, all the sense objects are there to choose from, but what is there inside?

Connecting with God and guru

When one redirects the emotions, two things have to become the focus: God and guru. God in the form of energy, in the form of consciousness. The word 'God' is written as G-O-D. 'G' stands for creation or generation, 'O' stands for organization and maintenance, and 'D' stands for destruction, transformation or change. Therefore, the word God defines the aspect of creation and generation, organization and maintenance, and destruction, change and transformation. This is how God is an expression of the cosmic energy in our life, in our body.

Bodies are changing continuously, new cells are being born, old cells are dying, all cells and systems of the body are being maintained not by your effort, but by some other force. God is active within, He is generating the cells, maintaining them, destroying them. That process of G-O-D is happening inside at all levels. That experience of energy is continuous in our body, but we are not aware of it. It is working and functioning at such a subtle level that there is no conscious awareness of the changes taking place within. The body is the microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic consciousness.

When the emotions are directed to God, we come back to the first stage of bhakti, which is pious association. The second component of bhakti is cultivating the appropriate understanding. The third component is to become humble, to become egoless.

The fourth component is to use mantras to change and transform or alter the normal behaviour pattern of human expression.

If you work at the entire range, you will find that this connection with God is actually fine-tuning, realignment and adjustment of the psychological and emotional behaviours. Remember, the strength of God is not seen in a forceful tornado, but in a soft gentle breeze. In the same manner, the experience of God that we have in bhakti yoga is of peace, joy, auspiciousness, truth and bliss. Therefore, the yogic traditions have defined God as *sat-chit-ananda*, truth-consciousness-bliss. The concept of God has been defined as Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram. *Satyam* means truth, *Shivam* means auspiciousness, *Sundaram* means beauty.

Becoming natural

From this perspective, we have to discover the truth through the practice of bhakti yoga. That is where unmasking becomes the first attainment in bhakti. Where you begin to remove the masks that you have put on yourself and become natural, you become truthful to yourself and you know that you are truthful to yourself.

There was a fair in Venice many hundreds of years ago and my great-great-great-grandfather guru had come to participate in that fair. He was on a tour through Italy with a group of disciples, he came to Venice for a program and there was the fair. My guruji was goaded by the Italian disciples to participate in the fair, to be the first yogi from the Himalayas to participate in the Venice fair. At that time, the fair used to have archery contests and of course the



winner would take home one ton of Italian marble. That's how the Italian marble has gone all over the world; many participants took one ton each.

My great-great-great-grandfather guruji was put in a spot, so he said he would participate in the archery contest. They went to Plaza San Marco where the contest was being held, and each participant was given a bow and three arrows. They had to shoot the bull's eye about thirty metres away. Everybody tried their luck. Some people had lady luck smile at them, some did not. When the turn of my great-great-great-grandfather guruji came, he was very confident. He goes there, takes his stand, picks an arrow, strings it on the bow and flies it. Unfortunately, the arrow goes the other way. All the Italians started to laugh to see this great yogi from the Himalayas who could not even shoot a straight arrow. He picked up the second arrow. This time, very carefully he checks the air, adjusts his body properly and very cautiously he pulls and pulls and pulls. This time the arrow goes halfway and then down. Again there is a big laugh from the Italians.

The third time my great-great-great-grandfather guruji says, all right, to hell with everyone. He picks up the arrow, shoots, and it goes straight to the bull's eye. There is a big applause from the crowd and he wins his one ton of Italian marble. As he is dragging that marble, one of the disciples thinks there must be some reason for guruji to behave in this manner. So the disciple asked him, in Italian, can you please tell us what were you doing when you were shooting the arrows. And the great-great-great-grandfather of Anandananda translated it for him.

Guruji said, the first time it was an over-confident person shooting the arrow. An over-confident person



always thinks he can achieve anything in life, but they always miss the point. After the failure of the first time, the person becomes under-confident and takes all the precautions to ensure that everything is done in the right manner, but somehow even that effort fails in half. He stopped after this and continued to drag his one ton of Italian marble to the ship. So the disciple again says, “Master, you have only spoken of the first two people who were shooting the arrows, what about the third one?” The master looks back while dragging the marble and says, “That was me.”

‘Me’ here means the natural self, not the over-confident or the under-confident person, but the natural self. This is the removal of the mask, according to bhakti yoga. When you become natural, when there is no imposed projection of an image, when you are able to guide and control the energies in motion within you, you are able to cultivate the positive, optimistic and qualitative form of life.

Evoking a state of mind

Mantras are also a part of bhakti yoga. They may be used as meditation or chants. They may be used for healing other people and oneself. In the form of kirtan, mantras can be practised in many different ways to evoke a different state of mind and experience through which one can develop unconditional love, develop the qualities of compassion and friendship, stop being dependent on others or on one’s own ego and express the freedom of sentiments.

The transformation through bhakti yoga leads to karma yoga. As you transform your nature, you become more aligned with the cosmic energy and that cosmic energy then guides you. If you want to cross a river you can’t swim straight across, you have to go with the



current. If you struggle against the current, you won’t go anywhere, but if you simply surrender, the current will carry you. You can use the flow and the strength of that current to go where you wish to go.

Culmination of bhakti

Bhakti yoga is something Swami Sivanandaji always insisted upon. He used to say that during kirtan you have to get out of the conditioned mind space and be free; don’t think that you can’t sing or you have a bad voice or a cracked throat. Don’t be self-conscious because it is you who has to build up that connection with your inner self.

It is the building of the inner connection that is known as bhakti yoga. The quality of unconditional love, sympathy and oneness develops. Harmony between the extreme poles of pleasure and pain develops, humility and awareness of the transcendental nature in our life develops. This is the culmination of bhakti yoga.

How can we practise bhakti yoga in our life? The answer will be given tomorrow.

In a short while, we will chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra along with a havan or fire ceremony. The program will be held on the beach. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra is chanted every Saturday in our ashrams and there are many people who chant it in their homes also. The purpose is well-being of one and all. In the ashram we chant the mantra for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of those who are in the ashram and also for those who write to us for spiritual help. We will also perform the Maha Mantra path in the evening. Everyone is welcome to participate in the havan. After the havan, we shall do a small kirtan. Before we conclude, let us chant three Oms and the Shanti Mantra.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Yoga Pills

Venice, May 2006

Hari Om Tat Sat

We are coming to the conclusion of our discussions. What we are trying to build is a concept and practice of yoga which can be adopted by everybody in their normal routine. In this context, yoga has to be practised throughout the day. Yesterday I told you about the use of the two mantras in the morning. After that, if you are used to your morning practice of yoga, then do it, otherwise it is not necessary. Even for the practice of asana there are certain recommendations. It is according to those recommendations that you have been practising in the class here.

Yesterday I also told you that before going to sleep you should go through a short analysis of the events of the day to remove the barbs and the arrows that have dented the armour. So, a ten-minute analytical meditation technique at night and two mantras in the morning. Now, what has to be done in between? At your workplace or at home, wherever you are involved in the activities of the day, find a gap of five minutes, close your eyes and do a short practice of yoga nidra. In this practice, in a few minutes, only rotate the mind to different parts of the body, just one circle; then, breath awareness – inhalation and exhalation; and then, combine the mantra of the breath with breath awareness. You can also count the breath. When you want to relax the agitated nerves, the agitated body and the agitated mind, count the breath. But when you want to develop clarity of mind, then use the mantra with the breath.



The mantra of breath is *Soham*. With inhalation, the mantra *So* is repeated mentally across the length of the breath, and with exhalation the mantra *Ham* is repeated across the whole length of the breath. This mantra with the breath becomes a very powerful tool to clear the mind of tensions and stress, to have clarity of thought and the ability to take quick decisions and be in control of one's mental and inner faculties. This practice has to be done only for three minutes.

Rotate your awareness through different parts of the body and then use the breath and the mantra to clear the mind. This practice can be done once, twice, or as many times as you wish during the day; it can be staggered across the day, during work or leisure hours. These are investments that you can make for your life. For the first few days it will take effort, but as you become established in the practices, you will find it easy to do them even while working, to achieve total relaxation and clarity of body and mind. Thus, a brief yoga nidra and a brief meditation during the day will help maintain clarity of mind and a stress-free body.

These are the capsule practices of yoga which we can use in our day to day routine of life. Ultimately, we have to use yoga in this manner to make it more appropriate and beneficial for our environment. Hatha yoga or the physical practices of yoga are for the body; raja yoga is more important than hatha yoga and it is for the mind; bhakti yoga is more important than raja yoga and it is for the heart; karma yoga is more important than bhakti yoga and it is for performance. Our attempt is that in our practice of yoga, in daily life, we have a little bit of hatha yoga, a little bit of raja yoga, a little bit of bhakti yoga, a little bit of karma yoga.



If you are interested in kriya yoga, kundalini yoga and other higher yogas, then you have to go to an ashram. But in order to perfect these higher yogas, you have to change your lifestyle. Until that change comes, there is no benefit in practising kriya yoga or kundalini yoga. How many of you know kriya yoga and how many of you practise it? Nobody. Many people have come to the ashram and learned kriya and kundalini techniques, but they only learned it, they have never practised it.

The body senses what it requires, the mind senses what it needs, the spirit senses what it needs. There is no use trying to learn the higher yogas only out of inquisitiveness when you are never going to practise them. So forget kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, because it is not applicable to the life that you are leading at present.

What is applicable to your life is hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga, because they deal with your life at present, in society and family, and help improve interactions. The higher yoga should be practised when you are able to disconnect yourself from the influences of the society and world. Therefore, our requirement is of four yogas, and perfection in these four yogas will automatically take us to the higher yogas in the course of time.

To sum up, we include the component of yoga nidra and ajapa japa in a five-minute practice and that becomes your pratyahara practice during the day, as many times as you wish to do it. Mantra practice is in the morning, and fine-tuning of behaviour and mentality is done at night with analysis of the events of the day.

In our next session we shall look at how bhakti yoga can become a useful tool to help manage the dissipated emotions. Just as raja yoga is the yoga of

mind management, bhakti yoga is the yoga of emotion management. Emotions are powerful tools that we have within us which can help either sublimate the gross nature or keep us bound in the gross nature. You might have heard of the epic, *Ramayana*. Just to conclude, I will tell you the story of the person who wrote that book.

He was an ordinary man who had a beautiful wife. He was very enamoured by her, so much so that if she was ever absent from his eyes he would go crazy. One day, his wife wanted a break and without informing him, left for her parents' place. When he realized that she was gone, he was very disturbed. Somebody told him her whereabouts and he decided to follow.

It was night, he started walking – this was in the seventeenth century – and came to a river bank. It was pitch dark. He looked for a boat or ferryman to take him across, but did not find any. In the darkness he suddenly saw a small canoe on the shore; he pulled it to the river, sat on it and paddled his way across. He walked some more and reached his wife's place at two in the morning. Everything was closed. He knew that his wife's room was on the first floor and had a small balcony. He decided to climb up to the balcony and knock on the door. He looked around, and saw a big rope hanging from the balcony and was very happy thinking that his wife had left the rope for him. He climbed up, went to the balcony, knocked on the door, the bleary-eyed wife opened the door and went into shock.

He said he couldn't live without her, so he had braved the flooded river and the darkness of the night to come to her. She asked how he had climbed up to the balcony, and he told her. She said she hadn't left any rope. She lit a lantern and they saw a huge snake,

a python wrapped around the balcony with the tail hanging down. He had actually grabbed the python to climb up. Now she asked him how he had crossed the river. He said, "In a canoe." She asked to go and see the canoe. They went with the lantern and saw that it was a bloated dead body.

She realized the hopelessness of his love for her and said only one sentence to him, "If you had loved God with five percent of the intensity that you love me with, you would be a different person." When he heard this rebuke of his wife and understood the validity of her statement, he turned around and walked away, never to return to his wife again. It is he who wrote the *Ramayana*, the story of Rama.

This story indicates the fine line between sensorial love and divine love. He was totally engrossed in sensorial love and just one sentence from his wife changed his entire life because a realization came that sensual and sensorial love can be channelled into something spiritual and transcendental. Therefore, bhakti yoga, which is the management of emotions, is more important than raja yoga which is management of the mind.

We shall be looking at the component of bhakti yoga as a way of managing our dissipated and disturbed emotions. Then we shall also include one practice of bhakti yoga in our daily yoga routine. The same thing applies to karma yoga also. Thus, the lowest yoga is hatha yoga, higher than that is raja yoga, higher than that is bhakti yoga and higher than that is karma yoga. The primary class is hatha yoga, the second class is raja yoga, the third class is bhakti yoga and the fourth class is karma yoga.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Karma Yoga

Venice, May 2006

Hari Om Tat Sat

We are coming to the end of our time together and indeed, all good things in life should come to an end, for happiness comes only to balance out the pain and suffering.

Life is definitely a struggle. Of course, surrounded by so many opportunities and facilities we do not realize what struggle is, but the fact is that a life without struggle is no life. For it is the struggle which makes us search for happiness and freedom. If there was no disease, the medical science would not have come up; if there was no inclination towards material life, the spiritual science would not have been discovered. One is not inclined to eat unless there is hunger; one is not inclined to drink until there is thirst. There is no inclination to be healthy until one is sick and there is no effort or desire to transcend the limited self until we recognize our limitations. Therefore, it is said that joy and happiness come in life to balance out the pain, frustration and suffering. If there is excessive joy, then suffering will appear to balance it. It is in this that one has to find one's balance.

Yoga of equanimity

"Harmony is the highest yoga" – *Samatvam yoga uchyate*. This is a statement that Sri Krishna made in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Samatvam means harmony or balance and *uchyate* means the highest form. The highest form of yoga is acquiring one's balance and harmony. Each one of us



has to discover where we are imbalanced, where the shortcomings of our life are. If there is imbalance in the body, then effort must be made to correct that imbalance and regain our balance and health. If the mind is disturbed, then effort must be made to pacify the mind. If emotions are disturbed, then efforts should be made to pacify the agitated emotions. However, today I want to give you a different perspective of integration in life.

The body, mind and spirit are integrated with each other. Although, for the sake of our understanding, we say the mind is located in the head and emotions in the heart, there is no division as such. They are all an integrated aspect of each other and this can be understood through the symbology of a tree. What do we see when we look at a tree? We see the trunk above the ground, the branches and the twigs, the leaves, flowers and fruits. But what we do not see, yet know that they exist, are the roots. The most important part of the tree is not the trunk, branches, leaves, fruits or flowers, but the roots.

When you plant a tree, in the early stages you have to nourish it, water it, take care of it and once the tree finds its roots you can stop looking after it. Once the roots are firmly grounded, you do not need to look after the tree, the roots will look after the tree. Once the tree grows up, you don't have to worry about the roots any more. We have to look at our life in the same manner.

The trunk of the tree is the physical body; the big branches are the senses; the little branches and twigs represent the desires; the leaves, flowers and fruits represent the different thoughts, achievements and failures in life; and the roots represent the spirit. Just

as the roots can't be seen, the spirit can't be seen. What can be seen with the naked eye are the trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. In the same manner, when we look at ourselves we realize our involvement and participation with the senses and the body, we can understand our mind because of the thoughts, ambitions, expectations and desires that come up naturally and spontaneously, but we cannot see, experience or feel our spirit, our spiritual nature, because that remains underground.

The experience of the spirit is embedded deep in our consciousness. If you want to see the roots, you have to remove the earth from around the tree, but you cannot keep the roots exposed. If they remain exposed, the tree will eventually die. Therefore, the soil has to be put back over the roots. In the same manner, there are levels within consciousness, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness. Underneath the layer of the subconscious and the unconscious exists the spiritual nature, the spirit. The realization of that spirit or spiritual nature is known as superconscious awareness.

When you want to look at your spirit, you have to remove the soil of conscious, subconscious and unconscious memories, samskaras, karmas and events. Only then can you see the purity of the spirit, which underlies the subconscious and unconscious dimensions. After you have realized the pureness of the spirit, you fill back the soil and hide it from the outer world. The only difference is that when you put back the soil, it is clean soil. You can remove all the rocks which are the samskaras and karmas; you can remove all the weeds which are the vasanas or deep-rooted passionate desires. You can give nutrition

to the soil; the nutrition is achieved through yoga sadhana. In this way, you create a proper, positive and clean environment around your spirit. When the spirit is being nourished by the purity of self, then life flowers.

In order to nourish the body, food is needed; in order to nourish the spirit, restraint is required. Restraint in yoga is known as *sanyam*. Thus, food for the body, happiness for the mind and *sanyam* for the inner spirit. *Sanyam* or restraint is something very few people are able to experience in life because we normally understand restraint as limitations or blocks on the natural expressions of life. However, *sanyam* does not mean that. *Sanyam* means to provide a direction. If you are riding a horse and there is no bridle, you will not be able to guide the horse. The horse will take you wherever it wishes to go. But if the bridle is there and you are able to control and guide the horse with that, it will take you to your desired destination. That is the concept of *sanyam* in yoga. Guiding the mind, behaviour, thoughts and philosophy of life to reach your destination. The entire philosophy of yoga is based around this principle.

From practice to behaviour

Yesterday I was telling you about bhakti yoga as the means of managing one's own emotions, as the means of sublimating the normal emotions into a qualitative expression of human life. I mentioned that entry into yoga is through hatha yoga. Progression in hatha yoga is marked by the practice of raja yoga. Raja yoga progresses into bhakti yoga and bhakti yoga then becomes karma yoga. You need to understand this concept of yoga very clearly because samadhi is







not the ultimate aim of yoga; rather, there are two systems of yoga, one which is practised and one which is expressed.

Raja yoga, hatha yoga and other yogas are practices in which you need to involve yourself, work with yourself, fine-tune yourself and develop the ability to control and guide the mind. These are practices by which you are able to understand the intricate behaviour of the consciousness, by which you can awaken the dormant energies within you and come to a point of perfect balance in your personality and nature. All these yogas represent the personal effort that one puts in to become an enlightened being. Once you have become, then you have to behave.

What is the behaviour of a person who has become enlightened? This question was asked by Arjuna to Krishna: “How does a person who is enlightened live in this world?” Krishna answered by saying, “Just like an ordinary human being.” The enlightened being will have the need to rest, eat, take a bath, go to the toilet; he lives a very normal life. The only difference is that instead of connecting with the senses and the material nature of the world, a connection takes place with the inner self, the higher self, and that awareness will ensure that the person stays on track.

Take the example of a mother and child. She has a very small infant who is just learning to crawl. The mother can’t look after the child the whole day long; she has other duties and obligations too. So, when the mother is cooking in the kitchen, the baby is crawling on the floor. The mother is involved in the cooking, but even while she is totally engaged in her work, one part of her awareness is connected with her child.

She can sense and see the situations which the child puts himself or herself into. If while crawling on the floor the child picks up a knife, the mother will stop whatever she is doing, go and take the knife, put the child in a safe place and then carry on with her work. In this way, the mother is constantly aware of the child, yet involved in her own activities.

That is how spiritual awareness has to develop in life. You keep on doing whatever you are doing: working, crying, suffering, enjoying, dying, living, but have one part of your mind attached to that inner self. There is no lapse of awareness in that connection with the inner self, just like the mother who is involved in her work, but is continuously and constantly aware of the child. This was the meaning of the statement that Krishna made to Arjuna.

You are living a normal life, there is no hypocrisy, there is no feeling that I have become a saint and an enlightened being and other people have to see me as such. This awareness has to be cultivated, and the cultivation of this awareness is the outcome of inner purity, harmony and balance. The balance between the swings of happiness and frustration comes with observation, participation and involvement in one’s own karmas.

Balance in action

Karma is something that one cannot be without; the law of life is karma. The moment there is no karma, life does not exist. We do not have voluntary control over our karmas, but the grace of the karmic principle is that if karmas can bind you, they also have the strength to liberate you. When people think of karma yoga, they think of just work – physical, social or professional.

However, this concept of karma as involvement in action is a very basic and preliminary concept.

There are two words here: karma and yoga. *Karma* means motion, activity or movement. When you add the word yoga to it, it represents harmony in karma, balance in the karmas. Thus, when you look at karma yoga from this angle, it means that you try to organize yourself so that your performance, behaviour and actions are properly balanced. Such management of karmas is possible with the right attitude.

Many years ago, when Paramahamsaji went to Swami Sivananda for sannyasa, he asked Swami Sivananda, “What is expected of me after I take sannyasa?” Swami Sivananda said, “Nothing. Do what you have always been doing, look after the kitchen, the office, the publications, the guests, the management, the cleaning, the gardening. Continue with the normal life of the ashram.” Paramahamsaji said, “If I have to do the same work, I might as well go back home and do it there, at least I will look after my family.”

Swami Sivananda said, “You can’t do that, because the moment you go back to your family and home, you will begin to work with a desire associated with yourself and your near and dear ones. When they become the priority of your life, the selfish, self-oriented nature will develop and become stronger. At that time the karmas will become barriers and bondage, they will give birth to new expectations and desires, they will give birth to new ambitions and bind you to the outcome of your actions. If you do the same work in the ashram, in the presence of guru, there will be a natural feeling that I’m not working for myself or my people. Whatever I’m doing is an offering to my guru’s work or God. Then success and failure will have no relevance in your

life because if what you do is successful, it is being dedicated to God and guru, and if it is unsuccessful you still dedicate it to God and guru.

“When you dedicate your actions in that manner, you are free from the desire of the results. Just try to do your work with the best intention and utmost creativity, and be free from the attachment of karmas. When you are able to find the balance between perfection and imperfection, when you are able to find the balance between the performance of karma and personal expectations, when you are able to let go of your association with desire or the result of karma, then karma will not bind you. It will liberate you.”

This was the practical teaching in karma yoga that Swami Sivananda gave to Swami Satyananda. Of course in theory it has been mentioned in different literatures and scriptures. Even the *Bhagavad Gita* mentions that one must perform karma without any expectations, but with perfection. People read it and say, “What a wonderful idea!” However, to apply it in life becomes very difficult because you have always been trained to work for yourself, for your advancement and success in life. Right from early childhood you are told that through performance and actions you will get good results; therefore, aspire for good results. You are told to work for the gain and not to involve yourself where there is no gain. It is a social understanding that the more you gain the more successful you are, and the more you lose the more unsuccessful you are.

It is very difficult for people to manage their performance or karmas. The karma which we perform through the senses creates a reflection in the mind. That reflection becomes a seed internally in which we find the growth of either selfishness or selflessness. In

the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said that actions will give three kinds of results: happiness, suffering and a mixed result. When we perform karmas with the attitude of self-oriented gain, then the result of the karmas are generally negative. A very suitable sutra has

been given in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Be equipoised and balanced in the perfect outcome and the imperfect outcome of action.” The more you try to work without the mind putting its selfish colours on karma, the freer you become.





The shadow of a yogi

There is a story of a sadhaka who practised intense austerities for many years to have the vision of God. At the end, God was pleased and he appeared before the aspirant and said to him, "I am here. You can ask anything that you want from me." The man said, "I have nothing to ask, I did my sadhana, my austerities so that I could have your darshan. Now that I have seen you, thank you very much, you can go and I will go." God said, "But I have already committed, I have to give you something. Ask me for something." The sadhaka said, "I did not practise the austerities for asking something from you, I only did it to have your glimpse." God again said, "But I have to keep my word, so ask." The devotee said, "You are insulting me because it was not my intention to ask you for anything."

God tried one last time and this fellow became so angry that he turned around and walked away from God saying, "What nonsense is this! God who is supposed to be omnipotent and omniscient doesn't even recognize that I have no expectation or desire in my heart and he keeps saying, ask, ask, ask." God was slightly confused, he said to himself, "I have never come across a person like this. Whenever I appear before anyone, they all give me a long list of things. That is the reason I don't appear before anyone. I hide from everyone because of their long lists. Here is one person who does not have a list and who has rejected my offer of granting him special things. Anyway, since I have committed it, I have to do something for him." God continued to watch this man walking away from him. Suddenly God noticed the man's shadow, and he blessed the shadow with the power of healing.

The man did not know that he had received this blessing, he continued walking and his shadow continued to work wonders behind him. The shadow fell on a blind person and he gained his sight, the shadow fell on a lame man and he could walk, the shadow fell on a dead person and he came back to life. The man, totally oblivious to the power of his shadow, continued walking his path with a big crowd following him.

If you were in his place, what would you have done? You would have asked God to bless your mother, then taking out family pictures, you would have added your son, daughter, husband or wife to the list. Naturally, you will have demands. The demands come when we identify with ourselves. This self-identification is one of the biggest follies in spiritual life.

You look at the life of saints in all traditions and religions of the world. The characteristic of saintliness is selflessness, not selfishness. It is in selflessness that one becomes free from the binding effects and bondages of karmas, samskaras, performance and attitudes.

Maximum creativity

How can we practise karma yoga or yoga in karma in our daily life? Every morning when you wake up, think one thought: "In whatever I do today, I shall strive to put all my creativity in it." As an engineer, as a doctor, as a gardener, as a builder, as a housewife or as a professional person. Whatever be our area of involvement, we should strive to give it one hundred percent, as if that action is the first and the last thing we are ever performing in our life.

When I first came to the ashram in 1964, every morning we had to clean the ashram with brooms. After

one month of cleaning, I went up to Paramahamsaji, I was only a small kid at that time, and asked him, "Can I do something different from cleaning all the time?" Do you know what he told me? He did not say no, but he gave me a sutra – *sutra* means a hint. He said, "You might be tired of cleaning your own room every morning, but every day while doing it, think it is a new room and you are cleaning it for the very first time in your life." Since that day, I have had absolutely no aversion to any kind of job, I never get bored and I am never in a state of monotony because that statement has remained with me till today.

Many people who come to the ashram ask if I am not tired of doing the same thing over and over again. I tell them that this thought never enters my mind because the hint that Paramahamsaji gave me indicated that there is newness in every moment of life and you can identify with that newness. Before that, when I used to clean my room, I would just do a cursory sweep and get out, to finish quickly. But afterwards, I realized that I was looking at each and every square inch of the room ensuring that it is clean and free from dirt. That one sentence of his changed my entire attitude and viewpoint with respect to work.

Later I found that the same idea was transferred to other activities as well. Many times when I even look at people I have known for a long time, I see them as if I am seeing them for the very first time. It has become a habit, a part of my nature. And that is the starting point for karma yoga. With this idea you can move into the path of karma yoga where actions do not become a burden, but instead a way to free yourself from preconditioned ideas.

Back to basics

The second important thing is that you should never consider yourself an expert or master in what you do, but always remember to begin with the basics. I always prefer the basics. Even today I practise my pawanmuktasana regularly and no other asanas, no headstand, no shoulder stand, no surya namaskara, no peacock pose, no back breaking, nothing. Just stay with the basics to develop this awareness and understanding.

If you are an artist, be more aware of your effort on the canvas; if you are a doctor, connect more with your patients. Connecting more doesn't mean that you fall all over the patient, but try to understand the need of the person and help that particular condition. If you are a chef, give hundred percent to your cooking and ensure that every meal is the best meal you have ever produced. If a failure comes, smile at that and not frown because failures will indicate your shortcomings, weaknesses and limitations; if success comes, ignore it.

Failures are the milestones on the path of creativity. If you can observe those failures, you will know how far you have travelled on the path of karma yoga. Ignore the success because a task is bound to be successful if you do it in the right manner and with the right attitude.

Adopting a new attitude

Once, a man came to me in a very depressed state. He was about sixty-five and had lived a very good life. He had been in a high position in a firm and moved into a beautiful house when he retired. After three months of retirement, suddenly there was a fire in the



house and everything was lost. He was practically on the road and totally disturbed and depressed because of this. He came to me to ask for help on how he could manage himself. I listened to him, to his problems, his suffering and pain. I told him that his suffering and his brooding over the past was not going to bring it back, so instead he should think of the future and strive to make it brighter.

He was in such a distressful state that he did not really pay any heed. However, after meeting me, he was walking through the gardens. A few children were playing there with toys, dolls and cars. The children had a scuffle in which an arm of a doll that belonged to a little girl broke and she started to cry. The man went to the girl, patted her on the head and said, "Don't cry. It's only a doll; you can get another one, a better one."

I was walking behind him and said, "Why don't you apply this philosophy to yourself?" He looked at me in surprise, became quiet and left. A month later, he came back and said, "Swamiji, I don't know what happened to me that day. You were telling me something, but I did not receive it. When I spoke to the little girl and you made me aware of what I was saying, I suddenly realized the mistake I was making. Of course I do feel for the loss, but it is not taking me into depression any more. I am starting to rebuild my life again."

One's attitude is a very important component of life because with the right attitude one can do wonders; one can be happy, positive and optimistic. With the wrong attitude, one will go down the drain.

I will tell you another real story. A man came to me once suffering from hypertension, wanting some

yogic intervention. In the course of the discussion, I asked him if he could remember when he first became aware of his hypertension. He said, “Yes, I do. One day I was sitting on the sofa in my house watching the television and my daughter-in-law was cleaning the house. She was in a foul mood because she had had a fight with her husband. When she came to the room to clean, she mumbled to herself, ‘Look at that dog sitting on the sofa.’ I heard her and realized that she was referring to me as the dog. That was the point where I got high blood pressure.” The story ended there.

I asked him another question, “Tell me, when you heard this, what was the image of the dog that came to your mind?” He said, “Oh you know, the street dog, flea-ridden and limping.” I told him, “Your high blood pressure is not because of the statement of your daughter-in-law, but because of your identification with a street dog.” He asked what he could do, and I said, “Think that you are a beautiful, perfect dog living in a five-star room who is served meals on time on a beautiful plate. A dog who has a master-bedroom to sleep in with an attached bathroom, a lucky dog who travels in an air-conditioned car.”

Hearing this, the man’s eyes grew wide and he stared at me in disbelief. He went back home. A few months later, he came to the ashram again. When our eyes locked I asked how he was, and he said very good. I asked about his hypertension and if he was taking any medication. He said no. I asked if he had tried yoga nidra or bhramari pranayama, but he said not even that. I said, “Well then, how did your hypertension go away?” He said, “Swamiji, I followed your advice. I visualized myself as a healthy and happy

dog and that negative impression of the flea-ridden, street dog was replaced by a healthy dog image. And my hypertension has been cured.”

Building immunity to negative influences

What does the above incident indicate? Is this yoga? Or is it only a way to look at ourselves in a different manner? If you call me a dog and I react to that, I am looking at myself from a particular angle. If you call me a dog and I think to myself, “Only a dog can recognize another one”, then no problem for me, the problem is yours. Thus, the attitude in action has to be modified to ensure that our actions do not create a negative impression. In this way, we build up immunity to action, to the negative influences of actions. Once we are immune to the negative influences, our actions become creative. This is the concept of karma yoga – not what you do outside, but how you deal with the situation inside.

It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* that your job is only to act, not to identify with the action. In a movie the actors play their roles and express all kinds of emotions, so much so that other people get intensely affected. If we see a love scene on the screen we melt inside, if we see a violent scene we feel the corresponding emotion, if we see a compassionate scene tears begin to flow. But for the actor it is only an act. The actor may be crying on the screen, but inside he or she will know that it is only an act and the story of the movie is not going to change the life of the real person.

The same thought is expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Perform your duty diligently, but don’t identify with that action, don’t identify with the outcome whether positive or negative, just focus on being most

creative.” After having completed the action, know that you have given your hundred percent and knowing that, sleep in peace. The next day, again give your hundred percent, and the day after another hundred percent. Every day of your life, give your hundred percent and be free from the effects of actions. Don’t associate the idea of pleasure or suffering with actions, but find the balance. Here we come back to the statement we had first referred to, “Harmony or balance is the highest form of yoga.”

Balanced growth of head, heart and hands

With the use of raja yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga we are able to manage the performance and expression of the qualities of head, heart and hands. Adopting this routine is what makes us live a yogic lifestyle. Therefore, perform your duties with dignity, awareness and personal observation. There is nothing higher or lower, there is no work more important than another; it is your participation which is the most important factor. The participation has to be with a positive outlook, an optimistic outlook and with an understanding of your selfless nature.

Often one is selfless without realizing it. After all, why do you go to work? For the cheque that you receive at the end of the month. That is your focus and you think that is your money. But how much of that money do you use for yourself? Many people have their share in the money which you earn, including your children and your family. If you earn a thousand Euros per month, how much do you actually use for yourself and how much is for other people’s requirements? Therefore, even in normal life, although our attitude is selfish, the environment or

the situations require selflessness; the money earned is inevitably distributed. We are selfless, but we don't know that because we identify with the selfish quality. It is this attitude which has to be adjusted in karma yoga.

Raja yoga and hatha yoga represent the personal effort to transform oneself, whereas bhakti yoga and karma yoga represent the yoga through which you can express the better you. This expression of the better you is the balanced growth of the qualities of head, heart and hands. That has to be the purpose of yoga which is relevant to our life at present. For spiritual realization, we will meet again in the next life. Right now, let us take the first step in this life.

Hari Om Tat Sat

*Every day of your life, give
your hundred percent and be
free from the effects of actions.*

*Don't associate the idea of
pleasure or suffering with
actions, but find the balance.*



Living Yoga

Venice, May 2006

Hari Om Tat Sat

The first day when we met, I was trying to light a candle and all we could get was a spark. Yesterday morning we were able to light one candle; the spark became a tiny flame. By yesterday evening the tiny flame became a fire and today everyone is radiant.

Initiation

In spiritual life it is important that you first establish yourself in the path of sadhana. Do not consider spiritual life a supermarket where you can pick this and that and put them together in your shopping basket. The important thing is that you establish yourself in the process of sadhana.

It is when you have established yourself in mantra, in concentration and yoga sadhana that you should apply for a spiritual name, because then you will understand the meaning and relevance of a spiritual name in relation to your life. Otherwise a name only remains a name. What is the use of feeling happy that you have a wonderful spiritual name which no one else has when you don't know how to use it or identify with it!

My name is Swami Niranjan. *Niranjan* means immaculate and if I just remain within myself, feeling happy that I am immaculate, I will not derive anything from believing or thinking that. But if I use the name as my destination, as my sankalpa to attain in life, then I will make an effort to be faultless, to be

immaculate in every little thing that I do in my life. The spiritual name is not like any other ordinary name. It represents a direction towards which you have to walk to improve yourself qualitatively. It is not a label that you have; it is an aim to acquire, a destination to reach in life, and the motivation to walk this path will only come when you are firmly established in your yoga sadhana. Therefore, try to establish yourself first in a regular sadhana, and when your spirit is committed, when your mind is committed, when your intentions are committed and pure, then ask for a name, and not because you are curious about or desire to get a spiritual name.

Well-being in Venice

I have come to Italy after twelve years, and in these last twelve years I've been to twelve different countries to plant the seeds of yoga. Maybe if I come back to Italy after twelve years I will have gone to twelve other places to plant the seeds of yoga. I do pray to God to give us the opportunity to be together again some time in the future whenever it happens, whether in two years, twelve years or twenty years.

So, thanks to all of you for making this a beautiful event. A singer can sing a song, but if there are no listeners, the song has no value. The value of this singer has gone up because of so many listeners. Thus the credit of this program goes to all of you and not to us.

This has definitely been a very special time. There has been support and patronage from all corners. The community of Venice has supported this event. I don't know if you realize how much they have done to ensure your welfare in the island of Lido. The





newspapers reported yesterday that on the day of the strike, the management of different hotels requested to run the ferryboats so that no delegate was affected by the strike, and extra boats were plying between the city and this island to ensure that you are all able to be present. That has been the patronage of the community of Venice for this program.

We have been welcomed here by the mayor and the administration of this city. We have been welcomed by the Congress Hall and the administration of this theatre. If you listen to the stories, you will be surprised how things have fallen into place and how the locals have come forward to ensure that this yoga festival is successful. Therefore, it is befitting that we offer our gratitude to the community of Venice and pray for their peace and prosperity. We have all been part of an historical event. Venice, right from early times, has been the gateway between the East and the West. Commerce and trade was carried out through here, many social and ethnic groups passed through this place on their way to the western countries from the East. Venice is a very rich city culturally. It is also the place from where the famous journey of Marco Polo took place.

Today, a havan or fire ceremony was performed on the shores of this city. In that ceremony, there were representations from thirty-three countries. We were all united in one sankalpa, one thought, one resolution: peace and prosperity for everyone, well-being for everyone. These vibrations of peace, prosperity and well-being are in the environment, they are not just imagination or fantasy.

Just as radio waves travel in space, similarly thought waves also travel in space. Thoughts are emissions of

energy from the mind. There are radio waves in this room, but you can't see, hear or feel them. Only when you have the right instrument you can capture those waves and hear them. In the same manner, a psychic field has been created in these last few days in each person, in each location and in this city. If you had the right equipment, you would be able to capture these waves that have been transmitted. And those thought waves will say that this event is for the peace, prosperity and well-being of everyone.

Planting the seed

Unknowingly, many things have happened. When things happen in an unknown manner, it is best to leave them in that form. When you plant a seed in the ground, it goes through transformation underneath the ground; the seed lies dormant and when the time is right the energy moves inside the seed and creates a form out of the possibilities contained in the seed. When that energy takes a form, a small sprout breaks through the hard shell of the seed. For the new birth to take place, the old shell has to be broken. It is then that the sprout pushes through layers of soil and earth, fighting against the pressure of the land. Eventually, one day, you see that the ground has been broken and a beautiful sprout has shot forth.

What took place underneath isn't seen by anyone; people only see the flowering and sprouting on the surface of the land. In the same manner, you will not be able to feel, experience or even know what has happened inside you. You will only realize that something has happened when that seed eventually comes through the hardness of your soil. Then the softness, the beauty and the greenness of the sprout

can be appreciated. This has been the message of yoga during this festival.

We have looked into various aspects of yoga from the practical, physical perspective, from the mental perspective, from the emotional perspective, from the spiritual perspective. We have practised asanas and pranayamas, we have practised mantras and meditations. We have tried to take hints from different components of yoga to integrate them into our life and that has been an achievement.

Yoga capsules

I was mentioning that we shall go away from here with little yoga capsules. We will discuss that now, for it is time to round up what we have been talking about and practising over the last two days.

Your daily routine and sequence of practices should be the following: wake up in the morning and practise the two mantras, Mahamrityunjaya mantra and Gayatri mantra, eleven times each. After that, practise asanas.

For a normal, healthy person only a few asanas are important. The first is tadasana, the palm tree pose. Tadasana is a practice in which the pressure and compressions of the bones and the spine are released. It is a practice of traction. During the day we spend most of our time sitting, at home, in the car, in office. There is constant pressure on the spine, there is compression of the spinal vertebrae, the body is continuously folded. With extended sitting, problems in the lower back can also occur. In fact, due to lack of exercise and movements, most people have a very weak lower back. Therefore, tadasana needs to be practiced to release the compression from the different joints.



The second asana is tiryaka tadasana or the swaying palm tree pose. This is another very important posture, very simple yet very effective, because here on one side a lateral stretch is taking place and on the other side compression. This process of extension and compression releases the tensions from the sides of the body. If you observe your movements during the day, you will find that you rarely use the sides of the body. The practice is also very good to align the defects of the spine.

The third is kati chakrasana in which you twist your body and squeeze the various organs of the body. When you wash a cloth, in order to remove the water you squeeze it, rinse and wring it. The same thing is happening here with the whole body. This practice ensures proper circulation of blood to each and every organ, muscle and joint.

The fourth practice is surya namaskara, salute to the sun, in which the major movements are forward bend and backward bend. So, through these asanas we cover five different movements: traction, lateral stretch, twist, forward and backward bends. After this only one more asana needs to be practised, an asana of inversion, to reverse the force of gravity in the body.

All our time is spent standing up or sitting; therefore, the gravity continuously pulls all the blood and energy down into the legs. This is why a practice of inversion is important. However, inverted asanas are slightly more complex. Those who can should practise the headstand. Those who cannot practise the headstand should at least practise the shoulder stand. But inverted postures should not be practised by those with problems of blood pressure, circulation,



weak bones or muscles of the neck, or heart problems. They may look simple and everyone may think they can do them easily, but they should be practised only under guidance. So, these are the only five asanas necessary in your daily routine.

After the five asanas are complete, two pranayamas are important for daily practice. The first is nadi shodhana, alternate nostril breathing. It is a very effective practice to balance the nervous activities, as it brings about a balance in the functions of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. It results in greater harmony between the motor activities and sensory activities, and the pranic channels are cleansed, allowing pranic energy to flow through the channels with greater ease.

The second practice is bhamari pranayama, humming bee breath. Bhamari creates a particular frequency of vibration inside the brain which releases the cerebral, nervous and hormonal agitations, and you move into a space of tranquillity, peace and contentment. Eventually, you become the master of yourself, your life, body and destiny. These are the only two pranayamas that a healthy person needs to practise in daily life. So, two mantras, five asanas and two pranayamas – this is the practice for the morning. The entire sequence will take about twenty to thirty minutes.

Then, during the afternoon, when you feel tired or stressed out, practise the short yoga nidra we mentioned yesterday. One round of rotation of awareness through the different body parts, breath awareness with the mantra Soham for a few minutes. This simple practice will give you immense relaxation and the energy to continue for the rest of the day.





Then, at night, before you drift off to sleep, analyze the events of the day.

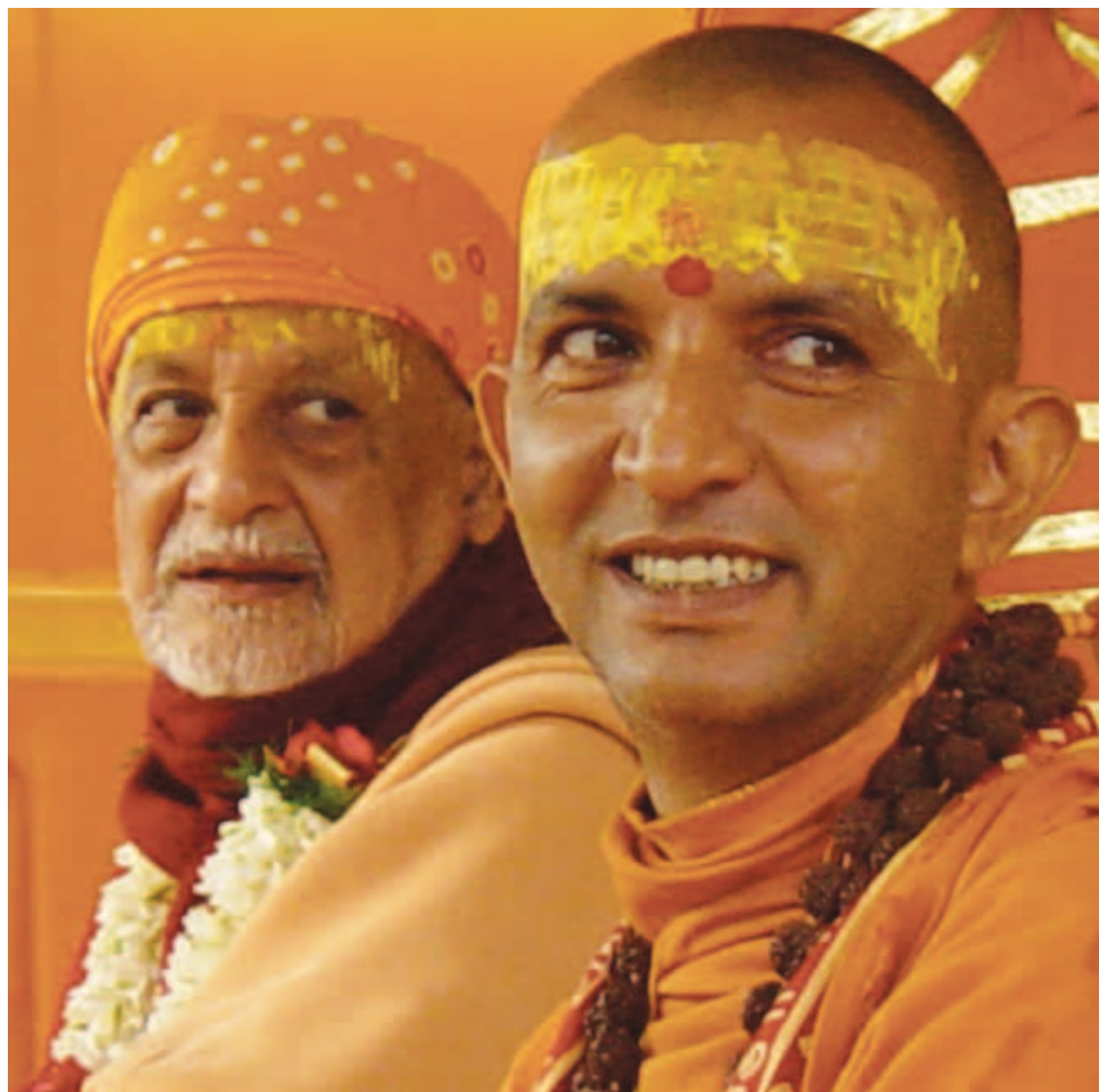
You should do this every day. This is how you practise yoga in the morning, afternoon and night. You will need to spend twenty to thirty minutes in the morning, ten minutes in the afternoon and ten minutes in the evening. Do this from Monday to Friday.

On Saturday, do something different. Practise neti, nasal cleansing, or different meditations such as ajapa japa, antar mouna or trataka. On Saturday evening, if you are inclined, chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra 108 times. And on Sunday, take off. That's it, this is the yoga capsule in your daily life.

Another capsule. When the body becomes very tired, doctors advise the injection of Vitamin B 12. I am not asking you to take those injections, but just as you would take them to regain your strength and stamina in conditions of extreme exhaustion and tiredness, once a year go to an ashram and live there in a simple manner. Change the environment from home to ashram. Change your attitudes, your work, your routine, your associations, which are different at home and in the ashram, and you will find that you are recharging your batteries. Whenever the batteries are flat, go to recharge them in an ashram. Just one week of ashram living will bring a qualitative change in your lifestyle. That is the second capsule that you need to have at least once a year.

Living yoga

If you can maintain this discipline in your life for some years while you are following other interests also, you will begin to experience the benefits of yoga in your life. Yoga will become a part of your life and not



remain a practice. Then you will be able to move from practice to sadhana, about which I mentioned on the first day.

When you follow your mind and decide what you are going to do in your yoga, that is not yoga sadhana. You are free to follow the mind. If today you feel like stretching your body, you should stretch it because your body is telling you this is what it needs today. That's perfectly all right. However, as a direction, a focus, an aspiration of your life, you should have a sadhana, a yogic goal towards which you are walking.

Yogic goals are very clearly defined: cultivation of awareness, disciplining and restructuring the personality, managing the mental and emotional distractions and disturbances, and becoming the observer of one's life and actions. These are the aims of yoga to begin with. When you have these as the focus and are striving to achieve them, you are doing yoga sadhana. Therefore, when you follow the dictates of your mind, it is yoga practice. When you follow the dictates of yoga, it is yoga sadhana. And when you integrate different yoga practices to aid the development of potentials in your life, you begin to live a yogic lifestyle.

The yoga capsule will help in incorporating yoga in your lifestyle and creating a positive and uplifting environment at home. In this way we are able to live, love and laugh. And living, loving and laughing is the aim of yoga, not samadhi. Therefore, don't aspire for samadhi or illumination.

Our tradition believes in excelling in what we do, and that is the real spiritual life. Realization is a very distant reality, very far from us. Paramahamsaji

says that it is not possible to attain realization in one lifetime by everyone because nobody wants to create any change. St. Frances of Assisi would never have become St. Francis of Assisi if he did not bring a drastic change in his life. Swami Sivananda would never have become Swami Sivananda until that drastic change came into his life. Swami Satyananda would never have become Swami Satyananda if the change had not come. And Swami Nirajan would not be in front of you if the change had not come. Very few people can bring that kind of change into their lives, but that is what creates a yogic culture, about which I am not going to talk.

I am only stopping at yogic lifestyle here, which is applicable to all of us to improve the quality of life, to improve the efficiency of mind, bring creativity in performance, harmonize the emotions and awaken the spirit. In this process of yoga, you have to learn how to become a gardener.

Becoming a gardener

Many times I hear people say that one has to be a warrior to win in life. I disagree with that idea, because a warrior wins by shedding blood and suppressing others. I believe that we have to be gardeners. We have been given a barren piece of land and through our effort we have to convert it into a beautiful garden. For that we have to work very hard. We have to remove the rocks and weeds, mix and soften the earth, prepare proper beds putting in the nourishment and nutrients required for the plant. It is only then that we plant the seed.

Once we have planted the seed, we take care of it. We don't allow animals to come and dig out the

spiritual seed from us. Jealousy is an animal, anger is an animal, hatred is an animal, envy is an animal, greed is an animal. All the negative things which disturb us are as powerful as animals and they create disturbance in our peace and harmony. They disturb the seed which we are trying to plant. Therefore, you have to be able to shoot them and protect the seed which you have planted, look after it until it grows into a tree and can manage itself.

Just as a little child needs care and protection in the young days and can be free and independent only when he is an adult, we are all in the early stages of looking after our seed or child. You protect the child from cold and heat, sun and wind. In the same manner, you protect your spiritual life from the positive and the negative and allow it to grow naturally. Through discipline we ensure that the tree grows straight. There may be times when you need to use secateurs to trim the tree. At that time, come to the ashram and we will provide you with secateurs and tell you which branch to lop off. But the protection and nurturing has to be done by you and your efforts will bear fruit one day.

Remember the story about how the land was when God owned it and how it was transformed when the gardener put his hard work into it? You can all be the gardeners of your life and ensure that all that is beautiful, good and uplifting finds a spot in your garden. Go from here with a sankalpa that you will become a gardener of your life. We can provide you seeds, but you have to look after your garden and be the best gardener.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Impressions...

The most beautiful soul

Sn. Arun Kiran

Swami Niranjan is for me the most beautiful soul I ever met in my life. I met him for the first time in Venice in 2006. At the first moment I was impressed by his tall figure and his controlled and authoritative attitude, but that was just in the first moment. Soon and somewhat suddenly, I realized his delicate and sweet nature.

I was running like a child after him to take photos and he let me do that. Then the program started and I was completely taken by his words, his energy and the feelings that he moved inside my heart. At the end of the program I had the physical sensation of my heart, and my heart space becoming wider like it wanted to explode with love. I had never had such an experience in all my life.

On that occasion, Swami Niranjan gave me jignasu sannyasa and I felt like a new life was starting for me.

Since the first moment I had the feeling that I could understand and hear his thoughts as if he was a part of me, because of his empathetic nature and his strong mind.

I again saw Swami Niranjan during the Sat Chandi Mahayajna in December 2007. During the program I had all my things stolen, passport, telephone, and also my personal mala. I remember I was very upset and all of a sudden I decided to buy a new mala outside Rikhia ashram and give it to Swami Niranjan to bless.

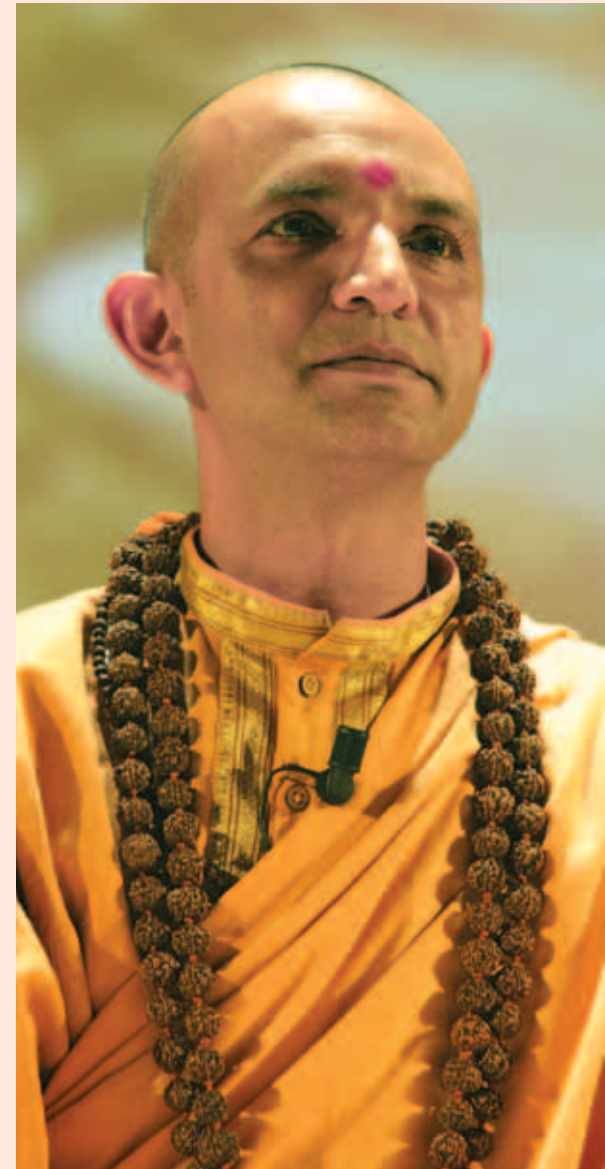
So, with the new mala in my hands I went to Swamiji. I remember his sweet smile and his understanding glance and I felt happy, all the sorrow for the loss left me. From that moment, everything in my mind and my feelings changed.

It was 2008 when I received karma sannyasa from Swami Niranjan and I still remember his gentle and delicate touch when he put the mala around my neck. I felt I was blessed by his energy and something changed inside me. After I left Strugnano, for a long period I had the feeling of the presence of Devi Ma wherever I was looking. I was feeling a sense of quietness and order everywhere even in the middle of the city traffic.

In December 2008, I went for the first time to Munger and on that occasion, Swami Niranjan was giving morning class to the guests and residents. I was really fortunate to be there and the classes were so enjoyable because of Swamiji's sense of humour and joyfulness. He was really inspiring. When I went back to Italy I tried to follow his example, putting a little more humour and happiness into my yoga classes.

Swami Niranjan is for me an example of perfect surrender, love and obedience towards guru. His eyes are like mirrors where you can see reflected all the divine qualities of his soul. They are full of presence and awareness, sometimes they are serious and attentive, other times full of joy and love, or innocent like the eyes of a child.

It is easy for me to relate with Swami Niranjan because I trust him and I feel that with him I can just be myself and I know that his heart is so big that he can embrace all of us in spite of our shortcomings.



Deeper teaching

Sn. Trigunananda

Amongst all the meetings with Swami Niranjanananda I was so lucky to have, the one which more than any other remains in my heart, is the one during the International Satyananda Yoga Festival at Lido di Venezia in May 2006. It was not an easy approach. On the contrary, I was not allowed to stay even for a minute face to face with my master.

The task assigned to me as seva was direction of the event. It was necessary to keep under control for three days, from morning to evening, without a single break, an endless number of things, from the flower arrangement on the stage to the coordination of sound and light technicians, and of property-masters of the theatre where the Yoga Festival was taking place.

The participants at the festival were more than eight hundred. Every minute a new problem was arising. Orders, however, were clear: everything should go in the best way.

Besides the great responsibility and the tension, what was really heavy for me to bear was the impossibility of following the talks of Swamiji. The subject of those three days was of great interest, 'Living Yoga'.

The desire to follow the thread of his speeches was as great as the trouble of being distracted all the time. As soon as my mind was able to, just for one minute, be tuned in to the flow of his words, there was someone or something coming up to break this tuning. Reminding myself to have patience was useless; I was exasperated. When the festival was over, the feeling of having lost a great opportunity remained with me.

The regret for the lost teaching prevailed over any other feeling. I was wrong. The night after the last day, when finally I could fall asleep I had an upsetting dream, which besides shaking me deeply, radically reversed the wrong view which was in my mind. When I woke up, all the talks of Swamiji, bright and clear, appeared to my consciousness in perfect sequence.

It became clear to me how wrong had been the anxiety of learning, how erroneous the fear to lose what I wanted to keep at all costs. I could not have had in a dream a more beautiful present, a deeper teaching. I won't forget it as long as I live.

Like a light shining in the night

Sn. Divyajyoti

The meeting with Swamiji in Venice in 2006 has been one of the most important experiences of my life. I had not seen him for twelve years, since he came to Italy for the first time and I began my spiritual run with him. In those twelve years a lot of things had happened, in my personal as well as spiritual life.

For a certain period my husband and I had taken, with the permission of Swamiji, a different path that we thought closer to us at that time. However, that choice made us confused and dissatisfied, but we didn't yet have a clear vision of things. These had been difficult years from which it seemed hard to get out.

Then... we were invited to Venice for the symposium and the desire to see Swamiji again was very intense. When we disembarked from the ferryboat, the first person that we met 'casually' was him, and in seeing us

he, in his spontaneous humility, greeted us with such warmth. The impact was very strong, just to see him.

Shortly after the seminar began and having just entered the room, something amazing happened, at a very subtle level, which will be difficult to forget. We felt perfectly at ease in the environment and with the people, it was like being at home, as if the twelve years had never passed. When Swami Niranjan entered the room, he was like a light shining in the night.

The clarity of his words, the teachings that went straight to the heart, the simplicity of his gestures, his childish smile, transformed our hearts and calmed our minds. Slowly, listening to him and entering that atmosphere of deep teachings, continuous inspiration, songs, flowers and playfulness, in those days, without our realizing it, the mind cleared and the capacity of perception sharpened. The heart felt lighter, the doubts faded away, and there was a deep feeling of happiness, a happiness that was also liberating. As if loosening the knots that we carried with us, we experienced an internal liberty again after so long.

It is difficult to tell what we received in those days, but our lives are completely changed. In the following months, we made the most important choices of our life, supported by the thought and the precise conviction that Swamiji was inside of us, as always. And we have continued on our path from where we had left him.

The nearness of Swami Anandananda has helped us to rationalize something which had happened at a subtle level in Venice; he has sustained and supported us with affection.

The following year we went to Strunjan. There we received initiation into karma sannyasa and our



spiritual life moved forward with joy and enthusiasm renewed.

Swamiji has given us all with only his presence in Venice that through which darkness turns into light, the indefinite into defined, confusion into clarity.

Personally I'm grateful to Swamiji for every time that I have called him in my heart and he has come, for every time that he has tenderly guided me in a dream. Just his photo has given me the strength to overcome moments of great difficulty. I am also sure that his presence resides in the heart and I can meet him whenever my heart is pure enough to feel him.

The first glance

Sn. Parvati

The first time that I met Swami Niranjan in person was in Palma di Majorca in 2004, even though I can say that he has always been with me, in a special place in my heart.

I had just finished my Teacher Training Course and I had been involved in Satyananda Yoga for more than five years. I knew fairly well the philosophy and approach of this school of yoga, and of course I knew the inspirers. However, until then all this was in a sense pure theory and, I can now say, I was mainly guided by faith.

I still remember the first glance that I had of Swamiji. We were all gathered under a big tent and the whole audience was waiting for him to come on stage. Everybody was looking at the stage, but Swamiji appeared by the side of the tent and he was looking at us all with an innocent and amused smile. When everybody

realized that he was there, the actual program started with a burst. I still remember that smile!

Since then I have always been in contact with him, whether travelling to his programs around the world where and when possible, or in India, and more importantly in my heart.

Another opportunity was taking part in the program that he conducted in Venice in 2006 where he not only explained once again the aim and meaning of yoga, but gave to all of us some very useful suggestions for a daily and weekly practice in order to let yoga become a full part of our lives. This is something that he emphasizes all the time as we do not have to 'speak about' or 'teach' yoga, but we must 'live' yoga in order to understand that it can be of help to everybody only when it really becomes part of your way of living.

If I were to describe Swamiji and the way he inspires me as a yoga teacher, a sannyasin, and more important as a person, I would say that he does it through his way of being more than through his words. I try to spend as much time as possible with him and every time I learn something new.

His way of speaking on any possible subject is always so straight and clear that everything seems simple, even the most difficult topic. His attitude of analyzing ideas very deeply, for example – taking a given concept, getting to the core of it, looking at it from a different perspective and then putting it together again, but from a different point of view. It goes to show how things should be seen not only from the point of view that we have at first glance, but with a more insightful knowledge and with a different meaning.

He has an astonishing capacity of adapting his language to different circumstances, according to the type of audience and the topic at hand. His sense of humour is something so typical of him and he knows how to use it at the right moment, which always makes his satsangs very amusing and friendly, and easier to remember.

I saw Swamiji in different circumstances. With his mother in Munger I saw him becoming a son, with his guru in Rikhia becoming a disciple, with people becoming a guide and an inspirer, and with me I feel he is the person who knows me best, the one to whom I can really open my heart.

When you are lucky to find a guru, you do not need much effort to explain, you just have to open your heart to him and connect from a different perspective in order to let that special flow pass through you and guide you through your life.

Unforgettable days

Sn. Maitri

It was the end of May 2005. I remember very well it was a Saturday and I was in my car, when I received a phonecall from Swami Shaktidhara. She told me that Swami Niranjan, who was in Colombia for a program, had decided that Venice was the chosen place for the 2006 program. I still remember my joy; it didn't seem possible! Swamiji chose Venice, my town, as the place for the International Satyananda Yoga Festival 2006. Immediately, I thought that his presence in this place and the very nature of the event would create an even stronger link with my master.



In 1994, in Rimini, I met Swami Niranjan for the first time. On that occasion I received my spiritual name, symbol and mantra. It was a very important encounter for me because I was going through a particularly difficult time. I had been attending a yoga course for some years, and to ask for initiation seemed to me a good starting point. That request could be a tool to find mental stability and have clarity within myself. Being in his presence left me with beautiful emotions and sensations, and I still keep them inside.

Later on, his teachings helped me to create inner harmony with great benefit to my life. Thanks to that, yoga has become an integral part of my life. For this reason I decided to enrol in the Teacher Training Course and during the time spent in the ashram at Montescudo, I experienced the value of karma yoga. Over the years, Swami Anandananda and Swami Shaktidhara played an important role in my life; they taught me, with their example, how to put into practice the teachings of the masters. They have been a bridge and have kept alive the connection with Swamiji, especially when I couldn't go to Swamiji's programs in Europe.

Another occasion on which I met Swamiji was in Munger for the conclusion of the Teachers Training Course. Every discomfort and difficulty of the travel was rewarded! We had the opportunity to live in the ashram for a week and have daily satsang with Swamiji. Certainly, it was difficult for me to understand everything, but there was always someone to give me the needed explanations. On that occasion we went to Rikhia also. Our group was received in Swami Satyananda's 'house', and each of us was introduced to him. I still consider myself very lucky to have had that privilege.

In Rikhia, I understood that behind the philanthropic institution, Sivananda Math, is a great force. It is a great organization and does a huge amount of work that allows the realization of projects that improve life in the villages around Rikhia. This drove me, over the last few years, to undertake to make people aware of Sivananda Math's activities and become involved in the projects, those completed and those yet to be completed. Each and every person who cooperated with devotion and passion received something which is not easy to describe.

During the program held in Venice I was very motivated and inspired. I had the opportunity to meet many people with whom I established a real friendship. Thinking back, those were unforgettable days, from the very first day to the moment when I said goodbye to Swamiji in Trieste, where we accompanied him in Slovenia.

It was on that occasion that I asked for initiation into karma sannyasa. When people ask me the meaning of that step, I answer that it is not an honour; it is, instead, my undertaking to develop positive strengths and qualities.

Unavoidable smile

Swami Yogamitra Saraswati

Being with a wise man is never relaxing and Swamiji is not an exception, in India, in Italy or elsewhere.

Even if I am before him together with hundreds of people, each time I feel as if he could see me, he was scanning me and 'undressing' me (his glance reminds me of a radar beam eluded by nothing). However,



despite the unavoidable guilt I feel because of my limits and failures, I don't feel judged. I don't feel as if I was under trial, I just feel as if I was before a mirror, tough as few other mirrors can be, but still a mirror, reflecting my appearance at that very moment.

It is his unavoidable smile that reassures me, telling me, "Don't worry", telling me that my being there, before him, in spite of everything, is already a great thing. I don't know, but maybe it's just his smile that tells me I should accept my limits (provided I am aware of them) and, when it happens, my emotions explode, my mind starts to stagger, my psyche gets altered and my spirit moves.

As you will surely understand, all this cannot be defined as relaxing, but it's not a problem: his words, his speeches which are never the same and somehow always appropriate, always useful to trace a path in the forest of our soul, are coming to help us. Indeed, what happens is that his speeches somehow give an answer to the questions you ask yourself, the urgencies that are gripping you, the problems you have to solve.

At the end of the 'treatment' you may well find out you are not the same any more (compared to what you were before) and you would wish to 'join' him again, in India, in Italy or elsewhere, to keep evolving.

Getting in touch with your heart

Sn. Mirabai

I met Swami Niranjanananda in Aix les Bains (France) in 1997 on the occasion of the International Yoga Convention. I had been practising yoga for several years and I had just started my Yoga Teacher Training.

Coming back from Aix les Bains was a great inspiration. Through his words Swami Niranjanananda made me understand that my idea of yoga was limited to a more didactic aspect: asana, pranayama, etc. I realized that until then I was simply a yoga practitioner; it was only during that meeting that I managed to have a wider and deeper vision of yoga.

Swami Niranjan transmitted a fundamental idea: the spirit of looking deeper and the simplicity of yoga. I could learn, know and practise every yoga technique, but only when I would be able, through self observation, to realize what is happening inside myself that I would realize yoga.

On that occasion I received mantra diksha and spiritual name: Mirabai.

I was really very impressed. I knew that the spiritual name means the attitude of our identification and our aim, the attitude we should develop in life. I started looking for the meaning of Mirabai, but I could not see how this was in any way related to me, I was a bit confused. So when I went to Munger in 1999 for my final examination I asked if it was possible to speak to Swamiji in order to clarify my ideas. I managed to speak to him in person and I was so excited that not a word of English, of the very few that I know, came to my mind, but I was lucky to have Swami Anandananda with me who helped to translate and express my feelings!

Something special happened at that moment, a deeper understanding at a different level. Swamiji made me understand that getting in touch with your heart is the most important thing in life and that I would have to work very hard on myself. By observing him I

realized how important and fundamental the capacity to adapt to different circumstances is.

I asked and obtained jignasu sannyasa diksha in Rikhia in 2003, with the intention of stabilizing my spiritual path at this level for a while.

I then went to Colombia in 2005, and two days before the program started, my friend and I went to visit the Sanctuary of Monserrate following the suggestion of our tourist guide. The sanctuary is situated at a height of 3,500 metres on top of a mountain from where you get a fantastic view of Bogota.

When I entered the sanctuary I was astonished. Swami Niranjan was near the altar contemplating the image of Jesus Christ on the Cross. I said to myself, "It is unbelievable to meet my spiritual guide in such a place!" That visit was a great experience, the presence of Swami Niranjan accompanied by Swami Anandananda made it wonderful and unique. I was surprised, so naturally I went to him, we smiled and shook hands with each other. I looked at them going away and suddenly I noticed Swami Anandananda (he was the one who encouraged and supported me constantly during all these years) coming back to me. He said two words, "Karma sannyasa." From that point on I had no doubts about my capacity to face that further step.

It is very difficult to analyze mentally such an experience that comes directly from the heart. Now thinking back I know that maybe I was really ready for it, I wanted to change my attitude of thinking and living in a more balanced way, so I was ready to follow the tradition of the spiritual path. So, this is how I asked for karma sannyasa diksha in Colombia. It was the beginning of a new reality; my guru gave



me steadiness in spiritual life. His teachings are my guidelines in life.

Swamiji offers very important teachings with his continuous messages. Some are understood because we are ready for them, some others pass through very subtly and invisibly until we can receive them and let them become a part of ourselves.

Sometimes I look back and wonder whether all this is due to me. What a big change . . . subtle, spontaneous, like feeling an invisible hand guiding and supporting me constantly in my process of evolution and I simply let myself flow with total faith.

Since 1997, like a calling, I follow Swami Niranjana on his programs every year, and every time he transmits an incredible strength, from which I try to take inspiration. His compassion, his simplicity and pureness inspire everyone who comes into contact with him. I learned that forgiveness and acceptance are fundamental for giving yourself a chance to change and improve, leaving a total feeling of freedom. He teaches us to excel in everything we do with the purpose of improving and to make perfect what we already are.

The path of yoga has given me the opportunity to live my life and my experiences in a much more positive, creative and constructive way.

Brilliant gift

Sn. Vimalananda

My first meeting with Swami Niranjana Sarawati was through a letter. A letter hanging on a showcase in the school of yoga where Swami Anandananda taught yoga. The letter, arrived from



India, said that Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati was appointed President of Bihar School of Yoga by Swami Satyananda Saraswati.

While I read his name, Niranjanananda, a cold shiver ran up my spine. I was surprised and thought there is some link with this unknown swami, but I don't know what. I understood it all when Paramahamsaji gave us Swamiji as our guru before his retreat in 1988.

I had the opportunity to meet Swami Niranjan at some seminars in Italy and France during his tours in Europe. From his wide teachings I appreciate, particularly, practicality. He is able to join the depth of the highest spiritual knowledge with practicality and to teach others how to do this. He teaches us with simplicity how to realize in our everyday life the highest peaks of spirituality.

Swamiji, thanks for this brilliant gift.

Swami Niranjan's visit to Satyam Tapovan, Vittorio Veneto

Jignasu Annapoorna

Still today, climbing the little road to 'The House of Yoga' at the Perdonanze in Vittorio Veneto, I feel a great emotion. My heart fills with joy when I think that he, Swamiji, was here, that he walked on this little road. I remember the joy we felt, almost unable to believe, when Brahma Vidya told us he had accepted our invitation.

Waiting for his arrival, we wanted to do thousands of things to thank him, to let him know we were so happy, so honoured that he would stay an entire day with us. We wanted to do the best to help him feel well, to let that day remain in his heart.

It was a wonderful day in May, the sun was warm and the hill appeared light blue coloured by iris flowers. He arrived and all the people at Satyam Tapovan ran exulting towards him. A big and colourful panel was our mouthpiece: 'WELCOME SWAN'.

It was very pleasant to hear different languages and see in the green a lot of orange, yellow and white shades and follow him with our eyes while he visited the garden, stopped to look at plants, smelling scents of a large variety of roses, watching the landscape.

We all went to a glade in the woods, surrounded by trees and rocks, gladdened by birdsong and butterflies, to see a very involving performance: *Antigone* by Maria Zambrano, a very moving drama about the theme of forgiveness. Swamiji followed the text with the English translation we prepared for him and at the end he warmly congratulated all the people: the producer, the actress and the pianist who accompanied the performance with his original music.

Walking through the woods he watched with interest two big interlaced trees; in the interlacing there were the chakra symbols. He laughed heartily when Brahma Vidya told him that unfortunately anahata was up there, invisible in the knots of the branches.

When we came down from the glade it was already time for him to leave. I remember that Swamiji thanked for the little gifts, symbols of the house of creativity, and while leaving said that he had felt a beautiful energy.

I wish to say to Swami Niranjan that till today we feel his energy in Satyam Tapovan and that if he would come back to meet us, we will receive him with infinite joy.



Live, love, laugh

Sn. Gangashakti

When I think of Swami Niranjan I think of his smile. Although I saw him for the first time in some pictures where he was a young and thin boy apparently meditative and somehow sad, since the first time I met him his smile has been everything. Not only he was walking smiling, talking smiling, teaching smiling, but the most amazing thing is that he is able to pray and perform rituals smiling and sometimes joking.

It is like he is able to joke with God or maybe God is always joking with him. I suppose he learned that lesson from his relationship with Swami Satyananda because he was mischievous, always receiving smiles and kindness from his master of love and wisdom. That divine relationship has gradually revealed to us the brightest side of the personality of Paramahansa Satyananda, and the sweetest core of the playful nature of Swami Satyasangananda.

Many people escape from meaningful situations and teachings because they feel sad confronted by them. People are often unable to stand drama, to learn and to hold on in stressful circumstances. Just as you have to attract the spirit of children by making them laugh, the same is needed for spiritual beginners. There is a poem by Swami Satyananda titled, *Make Others Laugh*, and Swami Niranjan is the living example of these teachings, in constant harmony with his motto: live, love, laugh.

Let's learn how to make it easy.

Let's bring joy to the heart of everyone.

Hari Om Tat Sat.



Development of Satyananda Yoga in Italy

1980

The event of Paramahamsaji's lectures and satsangs that he gave during the program at Numana in 1980 was the stepping stone of the establishment of Satyananda Yoga in Italy.

Paramahamsaji inspired hundreds of aspirants and yoga teachers introducing concepts and practices relating to japa, shatkarma, ajapa japa and yoga nidra.

After Paramahamsaji's departure for India, the demand for Satyananda Yoga classes by aspirants and yoga teachers in Italy increased substantially. In Torino, regular weekly classes were conducted from Monday to Thursday, and on weekends residential seminars on different topics were conducted in Torino and various cities and towns of Italy.

In December, Swami Anandananda accompanied a group of aspirants to Bihar School of Yoga in Munger for a Kriya Yoga course and satsang with Paramahamsaji.



1981

In January, regular weekly classes were conducted in different areas of Torino. Seminars and public lectures were conducted in Venice, Trieste, Milano, Rimini and Bolzano.

In March, Paramahamsaji returned to Italy to conduct lectures and seminars organized at Milano and Torino. For this occasion, the first edition of the book *Yoga Nidra* was translated and printed in Italian.

At the end of the year, a group of Italian aspirants travelled to Munger for a Kriya Yoga seminar held at Bihar School of Yoga.

1982

In February, the foundation and registration of Satyananda Ashram Italia as an Association in Torino took place. In October, the Edizioni Satyananda Ashram Italia was registered for the publication of Swami Satyananda's books in Italian.

Weekly classes were conducted in different centres, halls and schools in Torino.

Seminars, public lectures and courses were conducted in Rome, Trieste, Rimini, Venezia, Firenze, Bolzano and Urbino, in preparation for Paramahamsaji's tour of Italy in September.

In July began the free distribution of the first issue of the *Yoga* magazine in Italian with lectures and satsangs by Paramahamsaji.

In December, Swami Anandananda and a few aspirants travelled to Bihar School of Yoga in Munger for a period of ashram life.



1983

From April onwards, classes were conducted regularly in different parts of Torino with the addition of special classes for handicapped persons, which were conducted in community centres in Torino.

Residential seminars and lectures on different subjects were conducted in Rome, Bolzano, Trieste, Rimini, Pesaro and Urbino.

In December, Swami Anandananda accompanied a group of Italian aspirants to the ashram in Munger for a Kriya Yoga course.



1984

From January to September, regular classes were conducted in Torino in different halls, schools and community centres.

In October, the new Satyananda Ashram Italia centre in Torino at Corso Raffaello was inaugurated. The centre included a spacious hall, changing rooms, reception and office. All the activities of weekly classes, lectures, seminars, Teacher Training Courses, special classes for the handicapped and editing took place here.

In May, the Italian translation of the book *Dynamics of Yoga* was published.

Paramahamsaji returned to Italy to preside over programs organized at Ciocco and Venice.

Through the year, various seminars and public lectures were conducted in Torino, Trieste, Venice, Rimini, Pescara and Urbino.

A large group of Italian aspirants travelled to Bihar School of Yoga in Munger for a course on Yoga as Remedy for Different Ailments. During the course, Paramahamsaji gave satsang and initiated aspirants into mantra and karma sannyasa.

1985

Weekly classes at different times of the day and for different levels were conducted at Scuola di Yoga Satyananda Ashram Italia in Torino. A one-year Teacher Training Course began in the month of October.

Residential seminars were conducted at retreat centres in the Alps surrounding Torino and seminars on different topics were conducted in Gradisca, Trieste, Bologna, Imperia, Pesaro, Urbino and Bolzano.

During the year, the booklet *Hatha Yoga* was printed in Italian at the centre.

In December, a group of aspirants joined a course on Yoga Therapy at Ganga Darshan in Munger.



1986

Classes continued every day of the week, for beginners, intermediate and advanced students at different times of the day. Special classes for the handicapped continued both at the centre and at community centres in Torino.

In March, the second edition of the book *Yoga Nidra* was published in Italian. At the centre in Torino, lectures and residential seminars on Yoga Nidra, Hatha Yoga and Chakras were conducted during the year.

Public lectures and seminars were conducted in Mestre, Monfalcone, Montebello, Pescara and Inverigo.

1987

Regular classes and special classes for the handicapped continued and yoga nidra classes were introduced during lunch break for employees working nearby the centre.

At the centre, lectures and seminars on Yoga and Tantra in Daily Life, Ajapa Japa, Yoga and Health, Yoga Nidra, Nada Yoga and Mantra were held. The year also saw Guru Poornima celebrations with students and aspirants as well as a Teacher Training Course.



Public lectures and seminars were conducted in Gorizia on Yoga and Evolution, in Monfalcone on Hatha Yoga, in Ronchi on Chakras, in Grado on Yoga for the Awakening of Human Potential, in Gradisca on Yoga for the Management of Stress, in Trieste on Meditation, in Ancona on Application of Yoga in Daily Life, in Pesaro on Yoga Nidra and in Pescara on Introduction to Yoga.

During the year, the books *I Chakra*, *Karma Yoga* and *Surya Namaskara* were published in Italian.

At the end of the year, Swami Anandananda accompanied a group of aspirants to Ganga Darshan for courses.



1988

Throughout the year, regular classes were conducted by different yoga teachers from Monday to Friday for beginners, intermediate and advanced students. Swami Shaktidhara conducted special classes for the handicapped, both at the centre and at the national institution, ENFAS, in Torino.

The first edition of *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* was published in July.

Construction work of the ashram in Montescudo began in March and in the summer, seminars and karma yoga activities began to take place at the ashram.

At the centre in Torino, seminars were conducted on Kriya Yoga and Tattwa Shuddhi followed by the celebration of Guru Poornima; a residential Teacher Training Course was conducted in July and August at Montescudo; a seminar on Yoga for Learning and Teaching at School was conducted for school

teachers of a primary school in Torino; seminars on Nada Yoga, Meditation and Yoga for a Balanced Personality were conducted for yoga students in Torino.

Public lectures and seminars were organized and conducted in Rimini, Bari, Lecco, Ancona, Trieste, Napoli and Pescara.

At the end of the year, Swami Anandananda and Swami Shaktidhara accompanied a group of aspirants to Ganga Darshan in Munger.

1989

This year, the hall at the centre was extended and new space for office and cooking facilities were added. Weekly classes increased to five classes per day from Monday to Friday. Special classes for the handicapped were conducted by Swami Shaktidhara for two groups, both at the centre and at the headquarters of ENFAS.

Regular weekly classes and residential seminars were conducted also in Montescudo from March onwards.

Public lectures and seminars were offered in Rimini, Gradisca, Como, Pavia, Mestre, Mompellato and Santena.

The book *Il Mantra* was published in May and *Yoga and Children* was published in November.



1990

With the extension of the centre, more students could be accommodated for classes and for seminars. Public lectures and seminars on Yoga for Psychosomatic Disease, Yoga at School, Yoga Therapy and Yoga to Alleviate Asthma were conducted in Torino, while at the ashram in Montescudo seminars on Kriya Yoga, Nada Yoga, intensive sadhana and sadhana shivir and Guru Poornima celebrations were conducted.

In December, several aspirants and yoga teachers from Italy travelled to Munger for courses and satsangs.

1991

This year, the activities at the ashram in Montescudo increased regularly. Weekly classes and residential seminars were conducted on Hatha Yoga, Mantra, Yoga Nidra, Pranayama and Antar Mouna. A Teacher Training Course, Guru Poornima Sadhana Shivar and an In-service Training for yoga teachers were also held.

At the centre in Torino, besides regular weekly classes, several lectures and seminars were conducted on Yoga in Modern Life, Yoga to Alleviate Stress and Yoga at School.

Public lectures and seminars were organized and conducted in Gradisca, Bologna and Modena.

In winter, a group of aspirants and yoga teachers visited Ganga Darshan in Munger.



1992

Activities of weekly classes, lectures and seminars were conducted both at Torino and at the ashram in Montescudo.

In June, the second edition of the books *I Chakra* and *Il Mantra* and the first edition of *Satsang with Swami Niranjan* were published.

Swamis Anandananda and Shaktidhara joined the six-month Sannyasa Training Course held at Ganga Darshan in Munger.

1993

In 1993, all classes at Torino and Montescudo continued regularly.

In March, Swami Anandananda and Swami Shaktidhara returned from Ganga Darshan, and programs of lectures and seminars resumed in both centres.

Lectures and seminars were also conducted in Cormons, Bolzano, Trieste and Trento.

A group of 75 aspirants and yoga teachers participated in the Silver Jubilee program held at Munger.

1994

This year, besides the regular activities, Satyananda Ashram Italia organized Swami Niranjan's visit to Italy. During the visit, Swami Niranjan presided over a public lecture in Torino at the Colosseo Theater where 700 delegates attended his lecture. On the following day, a program of satsang and initiation was held at the centre in Torino. Swamiji then travelled by car to Rimini where he presided over a seminar attended by 300 delegates from all over Italy. Following this, he conducted a havan at the ashram in Montescudo and had a meeting with Italian yoga teachers.

Swamiji was then accompanied to Florence where he gave satsang at the Satyananda Centre of Florence.

On the occasion of Swami Niranjan's visit, Satyananda Ashram Italia published the book *Kundalini Tantra* in Italian.

In November, a large group from Italy travelled to India to attend programs at Ganga Darshan in Munger.





1995

In 1995, the activities of classes, lectures, seminars, Teacher Training Course and In-service Training continued at the centre in Torino and at the ashram in Montescudo.

Public lectures followed by seminars were organized and conducted in Udine, Cormons, Macerata, Trento, Bolzano and Molfetta.

At the end of the year, aspirants and yoga teachers from Italy attended the Sita Kalyanam program held in Rikhia and then visited Ganga Darshan in Munger.

1996

In 1996, regular weekly classes continued in Torino and Montescudo. Residential seminars on Sadhana for the Chakras, Antar Mouna, Ajapa Japa, Pranayama and Prana Vidya, Chakra Shuddhi, Yoga for Women and Yoga Therapy were held. A children's yoga camp, a Teacher Training Course, an In-service Training for yoga teachers and Guru Poornima celebrations were organized and conducted in Torino and Montescudo.

Public lectures followed by seminars were conducted in Milano, Bolzano, Chieri, Trieste, Pesaro, Ancona and Venice.

In December, Swami Anandananda and Swami Shaktidhara accompanied a group of aspirants to Rikhia and Munger.



1997

This year, besides regular weekly classes, several programs on Yoga and Education, Yoga for Children, Yoga at School and Yoga for School Teachers were organized and conducted at the centre in Torino and at the ashram in Montescudo.

The booklet *Yoga il Dono della Pace* with Swami Niranjan's talks and satsangs in Italy was published in Italian along with the second edition of *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*.

A Teacher Training Course and In-service Training were conducted at the ashram besides residential seminars on Kriya Yoga, Nada Yoga, Mantra and Kirtan, and sadhana retreats.

Public lectures and seminars were conducted in Bolzano, Recanati, Pesaro, Trieste, Milano, Bari and Molfetta.

In November, aspirants and yoga teachers from Italy attended programs in Rikhia and Munger.



1998

As a result of the previous year's programs on Yoga and Education raising a lot of interest among yoga teachers and school teachers, more seminars were organized on the same topic with the participation of yoga teachers from Italy and other European countries who specialized in this field.

Specific courses were conducted on Mantra, Nada Yoga, Kirtan, Yoga Nidra, Meditation and Kriya Yoga along with Teacher Training Courses.

Public lectures and seminars were conducted in Bolzano, Macerata, Cormons, Savona, Recanati, Rimini, Pesaro, Bologna, Milano and Venezia.

The second editions of the books *Surya Namaskara* and *Il Mantra* were published in Italian.

At the end of the year, a group of Italian aspirants attended the programs organized in Rikhia and Ganga Darshan.

1999

Regular weekly classes continued in Torino and Montescudo. Several seminars conducted by yoga teachers and swamis of the Satyananda Yoga tradition were organized and conducted at both places.

Specific training for Yoga and Education and Yoga at School was also given.

Seminars and retreats were conducted at the ashram in Montescudo for advanced students, and seminars on different aspects and techniques of yoga were conducted for beginners.

The book *Tattwa Shuddhi* was published in Italian.

Public lectures followed by seminars were conducted in Gorizia, Grado, Trieste, Napoli, Venice, Milano, Bologna, Rimini and Rome.

In November and December, Italian aspirants participated in the events organized at Rikhia and Ganga Darshan.



2000

In 2000, Satyananda Ashram Italia joined other yoga institutions of Italy in a federation recognized by the Ministry of Education for introducing yoga in Italian schools. As a result, several yoga teachers from the centre in Torino were engaged in conducting yoga courses at four schools in the Torino area. Specific seminars were also organized for school teachers and for parents at local schools and community centres.

Specific events were organized to contribute to Sivananda Math's activities.

As classes were conducted in Torino and Montescudo, different seminars for advanced, intermediate and beginners were held.

Sadhana retreats, Teacher Training Course, Guru Poornima celebration and courses on Nada Yoga, Tattwa Shuddhi, Yantra Drawing, Ajapa Japa, Antar Mouna and Hridayakasha Dharana were conducted on a residential basis at the ashram in Montescudo.

Seminars were also conducted in Recanati, Trieste, Cormons, Trento and Venice.

Italian aspirants, students and yoga teachers attended the yajna in Rikhia and satsangs at Ganga Darshan.



2001

In 2001, Swami Anandananda and Swami Shaktidhara handed over the centre in Torino to a group of local yoga teachers, so that the ashram in Montescudo could be developed further including the possibility of ashram life for resident sannyasins, aspirants, students and yoga teachers.

Specific seminars and training of teachers in the field of yoga and education continued with the participation of expert teachers from Italy and Europe.

Seminars on Yoga for Women and Yoga in Pregnancy were also conducted in Torino and Montescudo. Residential seminars on yoga sadhana including Kriya Yoga, Tattwa Shuddhi, Exploring the Five Pranas, Chakras, Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and Nada Yoga were held and Guru Poornima celebrations were conducted in Montescudo.

Specific seminars on Yoga for Rehabilitation from Drugs Addiction were organized and conducted at the ashram with the support of other swamis from Europe.

The books *Yoga and Stress Management* and *Yoga Nidra* were published in Italian.

In November, a group of aspirants travelled to India to attend the Sita Kalyanam program in Rikhia and satsang at Ganga Darshan.

2002

Regular weekly classes were conducted at Montescudo for students coming from Rimini, San Marino, Cesena and surrounding villages.

Weekend seminars on Antar Mouna, Raja Yoga, Mantra Chanting, Ajapa Japa, Kriya Yoga as well as a Teacher Training Course, In-service Training and Guru Poornima celebrations were organized and conducted at the ashram.

Periods of ashram life for aspirants, students and yoga teachers were regularly organized.

The new edition of *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* was published in Italian.

Public lectures followed by seminars were conducted in Mestre, Recanati, Torino and South Italy.

At the end of the year, Italian aspirants attended programs in Rikhia and Ganga Darshan.



2003

Regular weekly classes continued throughout the year at the ashram including early morning classes. Residential seminars on various topics and ashram life periods were organized and conducted regularly. A Teacher Training Course and In-service Training for yoga teachers were organized and conducted at the ashram.

The books *Application of Yoga for Common Diseases* and *Prana, Pranayama and Prana Vidya* were published in Italian.

Public lectures and seminars were organized and conducted in Mestre, Venice, Trieste, Torino, Recanati and Bologna.

A Kriya Yoga course was conducted by Swami Anandananda at the end of the year in Rikhia, followed by a visit to Ganga Darshan, in which 25 Italian students participated.

2004

In 2004, activities of weekly classes and residential seminars were organized and conducted at the ashram in Montescudo.

The book *La Visione dello Yoga* containing lectures and satsangs by Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjana was published in Italian.

Celebration of Guru Poornima and a sadhana retreat was organized and attended



by aspirants, students and yoga teachers, while a group of aspirants accompanied by Swami Anandananda travelled to Rikhia to attend Guru Poornima celebrations and visited Ganga Darshan.

Training of yoga teachers and In-service Training seminars were conducted at the ashram.

Public lectures and seminars were held in Torino, Rimini, Bari, Trieste and Venice.

At the end of the year, a group travelled to India to attend the Sat Chandi Mahayajna in Rikhia and satsang at Ganga Darshan.

2005

In 2005, the activities of weekly classes, lectures and seminars continued at the ashram in Montescudo.

The second edition of the book *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* was released in Italian.

Residential programs of seminars on different topics and ashram life were conducted during the year. Teacher Training and updating courses for yoga teachers were also conducted.

Guru Poornima was celebrated with the participation of several aspirants from all over Italy.

Aspirants, students, yoga teachers and devotees attended the Sat Chandi Mahayajna in Rikhia and satsang at Ganga Darshan.

2006

The main event in 2006 was the presence of Swami Niranjan at the International Satyananda Yoga Festival held at Lido di Venezia from 19th to 21st May, attended by 700 delegates from 32 countries.

Swami Niranjan accompanied by Rishis Vivekananda and Hridayananda and Swami Sivamurti arrived at Venice to preside over the festival which was held at the Palazzo dei Congressi at Lido di Venezia. Swami Niranjan delivered illuminating lectures on 'Living Yoga' and conducted a memorable havan at the beach of Lido di Venezia. Over 350 aspirants received initiation into mantra, jignasu and karma sannyasa. During his stay, he was accompanied in a gondola tour of the channels of Venice and a visit to the Murano Island.

Later in the year, a Kriya Yoga course for Italian aspirants was conducted in Rikhia followed by a satsang program at Ganga Darshan.

2007

In 2007, programs of classes, lectures and seminars were conducted throughout the year including retreats and special seminars on the occasion of Navaratri in spring and autumn, and Guru Poornima celebrations. The



programs were attended by local students and aspirants from all over Italy.

The second edition of the book *Yoga Nidra* was reprinted and the book *Dhyana Yantras* was published in Italian.

Public lectures and seminars were held in Torino, Milano, Cormons, Trieste, Venice, Recanati and South Italy.

A Teacher Training Course and In-service Training for yoga teachers were conducted in Montescudo besides seminars on different topics.

A course on Nada Yoga was conducted at Rikhia in July. In November, a group of aspirants participated in the Sat Chandi Mahayajna at Rikhia and visited Ganga Darshan.

2008

Weekly classes increased at the ashram in Montescudo, delivered by other yoga teachers resident at the ashram. Lectures and seminars on different topics were organized and conducted throughout the year. Special programs of Mantra Sadhana and Yantra Drawing were conducted on the occasions of Navaratri and Guru Poornima.

Swami Anandananda conducted a seminar on Antar Mouna at Rikhia in July.

The second reprint of *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* was published in April followed by the book *Vivere lo Yoga* containing Swami Niranjan's lectures given during his visit to Italy.

Italian aspirants and devotees travelled to India to attend the Sat Chandi Mahayajna and Yoga Poornima celebrations held in Rikhia and satsang with Swami Niranjan at Ganga Darshan.



2009

In 2009, special programs were organized in Torino and at the ashram in Montescudo to contribute to the Annapoorna project in Rikhia.

Classes at the ashram were further increased offering different levels of classes.

The book *Four Chapters on Freedom* was published in Italian and *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* was reprinted in Italian.

Lectures and seminars were held in Torino, Milano and Molfetta.

In July, a group of students attended the Nada Yoga course held at Rikhia by Swami Anandananda and participated in the Guru Poornima celebrations.

In November, Italian aspirants and devotees participated in the Sat Chandi Mahayajna and Yoga Poornima celebrations held at Rikhia in the presence of Paramahamsaji.







In Acknowledgement

Since the early days of the decade of eighties, many individuals who have been inspired and touched in the heart by Paramahamsaji have contributed and sustained in the establishment and development of Satyananda Ashram Italia and the spreading of Satyananda Yoga in Italy.

Their contribution in the form of dedication with sincerity of heart even while attending to their family and work engagements, has covered all the tasks required, such as administration, yoga teaching, translations, cooking, building, maintenance, gardening, and sponsoring of other events.

This is to express my gratitude and acknowledge the contribution of the following persons:

Swami Shaktidhara, Sw. Gyanvilas, Sw. Arun Kiran, Sn. Hansaswarupa,
Sw. Chidprakash, Sw. Ishananda, Sn. Vimalananda, Sn. Chandrakla,
Sn. Mandalananda, Marcella Cravello, Ulrica, Sanjay, Sn. Omtattwa,
Sn. Dayaswarupa, Sn. Omprakash, Swami Suryamurti, Sw. Manomurti,
Sw. Shivarupa, Sw. Chidrupananda, Sw. Vedasamhita, Sn. Nirvikara,
Sn. Brahmavidya, Sn. Premadristhi, Sn. Atmarupa, Sn. Hiranyagarbha,
Sn. Mridulananda, Sn. Virananda, Sw. Anusandhana, Sw. Uttarkashi,
Sw. Siddhartha, Sn. Triguna, Sn. Shivapuri, Sn. Virananda, Sn. Vidyarupa,
Sn. Anahatavidya, Sn. Mantrarupa, Sn. Mirabai, Sn. Gangashakti, Jn. Sevatma,
Sn. Sevamurti, Sn. Chintamani, Sn. Yogasamadhi, Sn. Kalagyanam,
Sn. Kriyashakti, Sn. Omnada, Sn. Atmagyani, Sn. Muktiprema,
Sn. Divyaprem, Sn. Maitri, Sn. Shivanath, Jn. Gyana, Sn. Sevamurti,
Jn. Devamitra, Jn. Yogadhara, Jn. Bhaktimala, Laila Wadud, Duncan Mackenzie,
Mariagrazia Maggolini, Michele Auddino, Marco Olivieri, Sn. Manasputri,
Sn. Karmabindu, Sn. Ishwarmurti, Sn. Atmajyoti, Loredana Fontana, Fortunata Franco, Jn. Chakra,
Jn. Manomitra, Gino Ghiselli, Alberto Racca, Camilla Guillaume, Mario Bianco, Mario Gatti, Francesco Leoci,
Cristina Cargnino, Carlo Poddighe, Marilena Perdomo, Amile Bartolozzi.

Gratitude goes also to all other persons from all over Italy who have contributed by participating in the ashram events.

With gratefulness
Sw. Anandananda

